

A RECKLESS PURITAN



MRS. VICTOR RICKARD



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BY

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OF GREEN BOUGHS," "THE HOUSE OF COURAGE," ETC.



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A RECKLESS PURITAN
PART ONE

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

EUSTACE CLINT stared through the window of a first-class carriage of the Great Southern and Western Railway, and decided that Ireland was a fine country, and that there was comparatively little wire in the landscape. He appreciated scenery from the point of view of a hunting man and, after the fashion of all true huntsmen, watched the fences as he sped along, riding a phantom hunt, with his feet on the cushions of the seat opposite.

He was on his way to Ardclare, where he was to stay for a few weeks with Lord and Lady Duncarrig, and though the *Morning Post* informed him that the country was in a highly dangerous state, the people who lived in Ireland seemed to go on much as usual.

Duncarrig and he had been in the same regiment in France, and comrades in the Great War, and now that war was over, they continued to be friends, and out of this the invitation had arisen. Clint had never been in Ireland, and Duncarrig, who though he spoke very harshly of the Irish liked Ardclare by far the best of his various "places," said that he must come over. He could give Eustace a good time in a quiet way, and the stables offered a plentiful supply of hunters, so that Clint, who was only coming for a fortnight, had no need to fall back upon local hirelings.

Eustace was a good-looking young man of thirty, with rather inexpressive, deep blue eyes, smooth soft hair and nearly Grecian features. He was quite well off, had a thoroughly modern and comfortable house in Buckinghamshire, and his father was dead. His reputation for affairs of the non-matrimonial sort, in no way damaged his character in the eyes of the world in which he lived, and to which Lady Duncarrig belonged. She realized that if a man had escaped a war marriage he must have some character, and dozens of girls had certainly tried to marry Clint.

War had done its best or its worst, and still Eustace was free, and therefore, entirely eligible for a suitable peace alliance.

The idea took shape originally in London, and Lady Duncarrig decided that Veronica Stuart, her own cousin, was exactly the right girl for Clint. She was young, well connected, had four hundred a year of her own, and since the Armistice had travelled Europe in the wake of international Conferences. No Conference could be complete without Veronica; and she was really extremely well informed. No word of any ulterior intention, however, had been actually exchanged between Lord Duncarrig and his wife. It happened, as it were, quite accidentally, and Veronica had arrived a good week before Clint was due at Ardclare.

Clint watched the changing sky and gradually grew sleepy. He did not strain his mind by thinking profoundly. All he knew was, that there seemed to be plenty of room in Ireland. It wasn't "cluttered up" with villas or gardens, and the women he had seen at the various stations at which the train had stopped, were quite charming to look at. He was a thoroughly good judge, and it saddened him a little to notice how badly most of them were dressed. He met with no black looks from the Irish themselves; they did not shake fists in his face, or accuse him of being a "*Sassenach*" (whatever a *Sassenach* really was) and he had a general feeling that they were maligned in the Press.

The journey was frightfully long, and the train was slow. His grand isolation implied that few of the Irish travelled first class, and in the end he slept until the train arrived at Mallow Junction and he changed to a branch line which was to take him to Ardclare station. The change proved considerably for the worse, the small train taking over an hour to complete the distance, which was ridiculous. However, Eustace made the best of it; he usually made the best of things, and though he had almost no sense of humour, he had a rag-time love of fun, which endeared him to all his friends. An oil lamp winked over his head like a weary drunkard and threw only a vicarious light around, and from somewhere in the back of the train there came a sound of slightly intoxicated song; rather a mournful and dirge-like sound, the words of which he could not understand.

Dusk was falling when he arrived at Ardclare station, and stood on the platform to look around him at a wide sweep of mountains, the colour of lapis lazuli against a cold primrose

sky. A faint line of shining gold to the west marked the departing sunset, and some pine trees behind the low white station buildings, sighed gently. There was a strong smell of burning peat in the air, and the restful sense of having come to a place where no one was in any hurry. Even Duncarrig was unpunctual though the train was well behind time, and Eustace watched the fire-lit smoke from the engine soar slowly upwards, as the train proceeded on its way along the faintly glimmering metals.

When his luggage had been piled on the platform, Clint turned to find Lord Duncarrig hurrying to greet him. He had been detained by a Vestry meeting, which was his excuse, and they walked together through the white gate in the paling. Duncarrig was genuinely glad to see his friend, and he talked in snatches as he drove him through the village to Ardclare House.

"The roads are damnably bad," he said as the car bumped through the wide, gaunt street. "This is the village, a ruin, of course, like everything else over here."

"It's a nice country," Clint said cheerfully.

"By Gad! And the people . . . a perfect sink of disaffection." Lord Duncarrig said something strong about "Republicans and Publicans," and they ran clear of Ardclare and began to climb a tree-bordered hill, where stars showed in a darkening sky.

The entrance gates of Ardclare House were only a short distance from the village, and Duncarrig explained that they would be in time for tea. "A few people staying," he said as the car came in sight of the lighted windows of the house. "D'you know the Sydney Marlands? Friends of Alicia's. She talks about vegetables."

"A gardener?" Clint suggested.

"No, a vegetarian," Duncarrig laughed. "That's good, Eustace! A gardener! By jove! But what I meant to say, was that the stable is ours. Veronica Stuart brought her own mare."

"Oh, she is here?" Clint's voice was neither enthusiastic nor the reverse. He merely noted the fact.

Ardclare House was a large solid building, devoid of fantasy. It might even have been a good hotel, and stood squarely in front of fine gardens, where the land dropped suddenly away in a steep descent to the river. A heavy porch, supported by strong pillars stood on top of a flight of half a dozen steps. Since the days of the first Lord Duncarrig, it had remained almost

unchanged, and the succeeding generations had done very little to alter it.

The large drawing-room appeared to be full of people, and he was led to a place near a fine roaring fire, with the pleasantly puzzled sense of having been swept back into some quiet corner of life, whither nothing new ever penetrated.

Lady Duncarrig was a slightly petulant edition of her own grandmother. She was unimpressive in appearance, and had an eager glance and all the right ideas about everything. You never met at Ardclare, in their house in London, or the other house in Scotland, or even at the villa at Hyères, anyone about whom there had been the smallest breath of scandal—that is to say, among the women. With regard to men, her views were different, and she was more liberal.

On the whole, she was conscientious and fussy, and her life was a pattern of virtue to those who studied it. She had married Duncarrig when they were both quite young people, and they, or rather she, had weathered the storm and come into the flat waters of middle age without disaster.

Duncarrig was a hearty mannered man of well over forty, who was sure that he must always be right. He did everything a little—rode a little, shot, still danced a little, and even drank a little more than was good for him. He read the lessons in Ardclare Church on Sundays, and was interested in the parish, so that he was also a little religious. He was a good Conservative; regarded Home Rule as a stale joke in decidedly bad taste, and the very mention of the words "Irish Republic" made him almost eloquent.

The feeling of the house was dense, solid and intensely respectable. There was permanency about it, and it implied that it would endure like the goodness of God—for ever.

After a little, Eustace began to distinguish between the guests staying in the house, and the handful of agitated callers, who had come out of the grey, whispering world outside, and were showing their sense of appreciation that Lord and Lady Duncarrig were in residence at Ardclare. Towards these Lady Duncarrig showed spasms of intense and bored politeness, and then again ignored them for a time, leaving them finally to their own devices from the moment when Clint arrived.

He was then given to understand that he was a welcome guest and Veronica Stuart disentangled herself from her talk with a red faced and noisy-voiced young man, and joined the inner

circle by the fire. She was a thin, intense girl, with a clear toneless voice and dark eyes. Her clothes were perfectly chosen and emphasised a vague distinction about her, which was her trump card. Probably she had already guessed the plan which Alicia had made for her and Eustace, and was not averse to it, for her manner of greeting him was easy and even intimate. Mrs. Sydney Marland also made herself one of the group, so that the disconsolate guests were left, looking considerably out of it, until Lord Duncarrig made his way towards them with great friendliness and aplomb.

Clint glanced at them, from the sacred circle round the fire, and his eyes lingered a little on a distant corner where an elderly clergyman was finishing his tea. A girl was sitting near him, looking about her restlessly, and as she encountered Clint's look she gave him an unmistakable glad eye. It surprised and amused him, but he was immediately conscious that Veronica was watching him obliquely, and he caught up the dropped thread of the conversation.

The girl, who was abominably dressed, had a piquante face, and the air of a schoolboy who has been up to mischief. She was small, and Eustace decided that her figure was exceptionally good. He wished that she was not so far away from where he sat, and he indulged himself in another covert glance in her direction.

The other callers looked to him all just the same except for the noisy young man who had grabbed Lord Duncarrig and was talking to him in raucous tones.

After a time, Lord Duncarrig moved onward again as though he were playing chess with himself, and paused before a deep arm chair where an elderly and handsome woman was sitting, looking like a Cassandra on the eve of battle. Her dignity had been affronted by Lady Duncarrig and she sat and brooded wrathfully until her host spoke to her.

"How are you, Miss White?" he said with great enthusiasm. He believed that he liked Miss White, and, indeed, that he liked nearly anyone who came to call, provided that they knew when to go.

Miss White smiled, and turned her back more pronouncedly upon Mrs. Francis Dykes, with whom she had fought some fifteen years before, and to whom she had never spoken since. Whenever they met they cut one another deliberately, and kept the quarrel up with unflagging animation, though the cause

which had originally been clear was now lost in the fog of time.

"And how is your father?" Lord Duncarrig continued breezily. "You must remember me to him."

Miss White flushed heavily. "He died four years ago, Lord Duncarrig," she said in a thin, petulant voice. "You attended his funeral during your leave from France."

For a moment, Lord Duncarrig's belief in himself faltered, but he recovered quickly.

"Ah, the war," he said, apologetically. "It has made me forget so many things," and he hurried on to the next group of forlorn-looking visitors, hastening towards the Rev. Mr. Desmond, with whom he could discuss the recent Vestry meeting.

From the direction of the tea table, Veronica could be heard talking of her experiences in Paris, and how, from thence she had wangled a permission to go to Warsaw. She talked intimately about celebrities, and alluded to her own reputation for tact, but her recollections of the places in which she had been, were oddly featureless, and Clint did not take the smallest interest in what she was saying, though Lady Duncarrig gave an attentive ear, and smiled with an air of considerable approval. Veronica was stepping up well, and showing her paces to admiration.

Eustace was also a talker, and he resented being reduced to the status of the mere audience. At first he had waited for a chance to plunge in, and insist upon being listened to, but at length he gave up the idea and looked again at the girl in the corner. She would have listened to him, he felt sure, and he felt slightly annoyed that she was so obviously ostracised.

At last the callers began to depart, led by Mrs. Francis Dykes, a pale, sharp featured woman with a bitter tongue. She was thoroughly disgusted by her reception, but did not dare to show fight. Once every year she dined at Ardclare and as this was a special favour accorded to her because her late husband had attended Lord Duncarrig's father in his last illness, she clung to it desperately, so that she was outwardly amiable and gracious.

"Oh, good-bye," Lady Duncarrig said absently, "I hope it isn't raining. The one thing one can *always* count upon in Ireland, is rain," and Mrs. Dykes got herself out of the large room, accompanied by Milson Rogers who clamoured as he grasped Lady Duncarrig's hand and seemed to make a lot of unnecessary tumult over the simple act of farewell. Close upon

his heels followed Miss White who insisted upon herself with heavy deliberation and discussed the prospects of a work guild with Lady Duncarrig, until at last she too left; Lord Duncarrig seeing her to the door. He was repentant when he recollected his *faux pas*, and wished her to understand that he meant nothing unkind.

The circle around the fire re-seated themselves. As for Clint, he remained silent, and Mr. Desmond and his daughter stood doubtfully at a little distance, no one taking the smallest notice of them.

After a moment Mr. Desmond moved forward, holding the arm of the attractive looking girl in the ill-fitting, cheaply made coat and skirt, and like a reluctant swimmer he approached Lady Duncarrig.

"I fear we must be going," he said, holding out his hand nervously. "Yes, I fear we must."

Once again Lady Duncarrig rose.

"Good-bye, Mr. Desmond. *Good-bye*," she remarked, and held out her hand towards the girl, looking over the top of the gay and obviously "Sunday" hat, which had been put on in her honour.

Eustace watched the proceedings, standing stiffly by his chair. Obviously, Miss Desmond was not a favourite with Lady Duncarrig, and she made no secret of her feelings.

Once more their eyes met, and Clint knew that Veronica was watching satirically. He repressed his natural impulse, which had been—awful as such a thought was—to wink, just to cheer her up a bit. Instead, he only looked self-conscious. It would have been like winking in a Cathedral during service, with the Bishop's eye on you.

She was pretty. As she followed her father out of the room with a jaunty step, he repeated to himself that she was pretty. Her nose had an engaging little tilt to it, and her face was freckled. The colour in her cheeks was a clear, faint pink, and her restless eyes, which somehow were not in accurate keeping with the rest of her, were a strong pansy blue. Decently dressed, and given half a chance, Eustace felt that Miss Desmond might be a huge success, for there was something of the darling about her . . . just what Veronica Stuart was not, and never could be; but the dim-eyed old gentleman with stooping shoulders and his daughter must be people who did not count; they had been bundled out of Ardclare with the scantiest courtesy.

Clint was well accustomed to autocratically bad manners, but some little feeling awoke in him at that moment, which made him antagonistic to Lady Duncarrig, and he felt that she was really a specious sham. She had over-dosed him with her tinkling effusion, and he sat down again, irritated and inclined to criticise.

Lord Duncarrig returned at that moment, and joined them, asking for a second cup of tea, and his wife relaxed her shoulders and lay back in her chair with the air of one who has come honourably through a trying ordeal.

"Poor Mr. Desmond," she remarked.

"I like old Desmond," Lord Duncarrig said with his unfailing heartiness. "He was very sound at the vestry meeting. The churchwardens were giving trouble."

"Oh?" Lady Duncarrig raised her light eyebrows; she was not interested in the least.

"No reason to pity him," Duncarrig went on. "A nice rectory, nothing to do, and a good garden."

"I referred to his daughter," she replied frigidly.

"Georgie? Oh, come now, Alicia, Georgie has no harm in her. A wild little thing," he said broad-mindedly.

"What has *she* been up to?" Clint asked, with a revival of interest in the conversation. "Is she a Republican?"

"I don't know what her political views may be," Lady Duncarrig replied, screwing up her mouth, "but she is hopeless, so unsuitable."

"Quite," Clint replied. "Oh, quite. I rather noticed it myself."

"You are always down on Georgie," Lord Duncarrig said, warming his hands at the fire. "If she does flirt I'm sure I don't blame her, and I like her brogue. It's charming."

Veronica for once made no effort to grab the conversation, nor did she commit herself to any criticism of Miss Desmond. The inference was that she did not consider her worth it.

"'Georgie Porgie, puddingy pie,'" Lord Duncarrig quoted with a good resounding laugh, "kissed the boys, but, by Gad, I don't think they'd cry."

"Veronica, dear," Lady Duncarrig said quietly, "how long will it take you to dress?"

Lord Duncarrig telegraphed to Clint that he was in disgrace for the moment; but he didn't mind. He had a kind heart, and he liked Georgie. Alicia was frightfully particular. He being

a man of the world was less critical, but all the same, Alicia was right as to principle.

"Here in a place like this if a girl has any dash about her she gets a black mark," he said pleasantly. "Alicia thinks, and mind you I'm not saying she isn't right, that a clergyman's daughter ought to be a kind of Miss Prim. Butter not melting in her mouth and so forth. Georgie is all right; don't believe all you hear of her, Eustace."

Clint went up to his room and his thoughts still occupied themselves with Georgie Desmond. He felt that she had shown a distinct wish to know him. Her method had been simple, like that of a child who had pinched his arm, cried "tig" and ran away, waiting to be caught and possibly kissed, to an accompaniment of laughter and slapping.

In spite of her vile clothes, he much preferred Georgie to Veronica, though he had not even heard her speak. She could not possibly dart about the map of Europe, for he suspected that she knew nothing about it, and that was a blessing. Eustace had a simple way of dividing women into two classes; those who were "his style," and those who were not. And on sight he had recognised that Georgie Desmond was "his style."

He prepared to resign himself once more to Veronica Stuart. It looked almost as though she were going to spoil his visit to Ardclare.

CHAPTER II

THE first meet of hounds took place in Ardclare village two days later, and the main street suddenly became as gay as a fair, with a good smattering of pink coats, and a crowd of lesser followers in ordinary clothing. Wild-looking boys on mounts which knew very little of the curry-comb, and keen-faced dealers who kept their eyes open and moved about appraising the points of young 'uns, with a view to subsequent barter.

The village street was wide and draughty, leading up to where a grey church stood at the parting of two roads, the chestnut trees around it still in scanty yellow leaf. An exquisite blue sky, rain-washed and clear, shone overhead, and the country blazed with strong colour, for there had been very little frost, and the woods were bright with the glory of the sweet decadence of late autumn. The air was as soft as silk and a light westerly wind scurried through the fallen leaves on the roadsides and whispered in the tussocky grasses. Everything promised well in the sporting world; the cobwebs along the thorn hedges glittered with diamond drops, clinging to the hard dark interlacement of fine branches, between lemon yellow leaves and clusters of red berries.

With a wild blue sky over his head, and a fabulously green world around him, Clint decided at once that it would be folly to allow Veronica to interfere with his pleasure in the day. He felt sure that for all her talk she probably was not much of a horsewoman, though he admitted that she looked extremely well when she joined him and Duncarrig on the avenue outside Ardclare. She was riding a bright bay, and her whipcord breeches and long coat were perfectly cut. No one could have found fault with her boots, which were perfection, and her hard wide-brimmed hat suited her admirably.

Lady Duncarrig drove the pony trap, and they started off down the avenue through the brilliant morning light, arriving at the main street just as the hounds came along another road, and a general move was made towards the first covert.

It was some time before Clint spotted Georgie Desmond, who

was riding close behind the hounds, talking to the master, David Cleary, and evidently amusing him, for bursts of laughter came backwards to Eustace Clint.

She was riding a rakish-looking iron-grey which required a great deal of managing, but Georgie appeared to be well able for him, and kept under his obvious inclination to buck. She was wearing a blue habit of ancient cut, and looked like a picture out of an old Christmas number of the *Graphic* or *Sporting and Dramatic*. Her habit skirt bunched up around her like a petticoat, and now and then she tugged it down over her boots, when she could spare a hand. Eustace was distressed by the effect, and glanced again at Veronica.

"Isn't that the funny little object who was calling at Ardclare the other day?" Veronica asked.

"Yes, I think so," Clint agreed.

"Her habit is a survival. I suppose she keeps along the roads," Miss Stuart said, with a touch of consideration, and as she spoke the horses in front slowed up, and David Cleary turned his hunter at the bank at the left of the road and jumped into the field. The hounds followed, and directly after they were clear, Miss Desmond's grey shot wildly over, and she cantered away up the headland.

"That doesn't look like keeping on the roads," Clint remarked as he rammed his horse at a likely-looking place a little farther down. Some one else had opened a gate leading into a lane running towards a wood covert on the hillside, and presently the whole field were jogging along between the hedges; but Eustace had got clear of them, and continued to follow Georgie, whose grey progressed in a series of rocket-like bounds, towards a sheltered corner a little distance from the crowd. He might have spoken to her then, and had some intention of pretending that they had already been introduced, but once again Veronica intervened and there was no time for him to manœuvre a meeting. Then hoarse shouts were heard from the opposite side of the covert; in a second, the hounds streamed out, and he forgot everything else in the realisation that it would take him all his time to keep up with the fierce pace at which they were running.

After a time he realised that there were now very few people in front of him. David Cleary, one of the whips, and half a dozen others were scattered widely in a broken line, and Georgie Desmond was going well, just ahead. It annoyed him to think that he could not catch her up, but he had ample opportunity

to realise that she was a really fine rider; and still the pace slackened very little, until they left the grass country behind and began to travel over poor, heather-tufted land, where a considerable rise of ground faced them. Again the numbers had thinned out, and instead of wide banks with deep ditches on either side, they were into a mountainy place where the small cultivated patches were separated by loose stone walls. The horse Clint was riding laboured heavily, and it looked as though he would have to pull up, when the whole tension snapped suddenly like a broken thread, and David Cleary, who had reached the top of the hill, swung off his horse and looked around him, putting his horn to his lips, and blowing breathlessly. All the gorgeous excitement of the run, with its swinging ups and downs through the valley, was over, and already the day had changed and there was evidence of that fatal state of affairs for a huntsman, "rain overhead."

Even the face of the country was changed, and the soft green land lay away below them, for they had run into low hills, and the air blew keen and cold. A group of stunted firs held the summit like a lonely outpost, and the wide view was magnificent, traced by the gleaming line of a wide river. Above the valley all was fierce and melancholy, and huge granite boulders were scattered through the meagre grass. One or two small cottages, surrounded by potato patches, showed that human life made an effort to support itself in spite of hardship, but the effect was curiously solitary and remote. A sleety rain began to fall from the fringes of a heavy cloud, and Clint turned up the collar of his coat and made his way towards Georgie Desmond.

Her face was flushed and wind-beaten, and wild straggles of hair came down over the wreckage of her ill-tied stock; the grey had had enough, and, coated deep with mud, was ridden to a standstill. Miss Desmond presented, indeed, rather a battered appearance, for her hat had been dinged in as she crossed a fence under a low-branched tree, and her skirt was wisped to a degree which suggested that she was now wearing it back to front.

Eustace intended to introduce himself, but it proved to be unnecessary, and she greeted him at once. "Will you catch Garryowen by the head," she said, "and I'll slip off. He's lost for good." She evidently alluded to the fox. "There's more

holes in Knockmore than in my stockings, and we've said farewell to him."

Clint dismounted and limped towards her; he was very stiff, as he had not ridden for some time, and they heard the distant sound of the horn coming faintly to them from the far side of the hill.

"David's at it again," Miss Desmond remarked with a giggle. "But it's no kind of use. The day is over."

Clint suggested that they should shelter under the lee of the hill, where the fir trees offered some protection from the coming storm. He was amused to find himself alone with Miss Desmond in this wild, new land, and, as she said, the day really was over, even if his hunter could have stood any more, which he doubted. They were a long distance from Ardclare, there was plenty of time before them, and leading the horses, he made his way to where a landfall had made a red scar in the heather grass, forming a deep, gorse-grown hollow, with trees on the sky-line, now straining and creaking against the wind.

"I've got some sandwiches," he said, having fastened the horses up to a couple of sheltered stumps, "so we can have a picnic; and there is something or other in my flask."

Miss Desmond perched herself on a mossy stone, and looked at him with her blue, speculative eyes. Her eyes attracted him, but he felt again, that they were unexpected in such a round, impertinent little face.

"I'll have a mouthful of 'something or other' first," she said, taking his flask and tilting back her head, "and then," she handed it back to him, "I'll have a cigarette."

Clint offered her his cigarette-case, and she helped herself. "Now, can you crack a match for me?" she asked, and he watched her absorbed look as she bent towards the tiny flame imprisoned in his hands.

"I wanted to meet you that day at Ardclare," he said, sitting down beside her. He felt that it was the right way to begin, and she gave him a sideways glance.

"Did you, indeed?" she remarked. "I thought you were otherwise engaged. What has become of her? I said to David Cleary, directly. I saw her, that she'd call a cab before we were long out of Templecarrig. That's the place where we crossed the dyke."

"I expect she did," Eustace agreed. "But you were quite wrong in thinking that I was engaged."

"Do you tell me that?" Georgie replied. "What a tea party! Dada and I were like the babes in the wood, and we couldn't hardly get away. Lady Duncarrig doesn't like me."

"Very foolish of her."

"Dada said I ought to come with him," Miss Desmond continued, "and when we got there I was left solo in the corner. I'd hate to be in that set, they're so stiff, aren't they?"

"They are dreadfully dull," Eustace said with deep conviction.

"Of course," Georgie continued volubly, "everyone here makes a lot of being thick with th' Duncarrigs, and one is pretending they go to Ardclare more than another. Mrs. Francis Dykes *dines* there, and Miss White goes to see Lady Dun in the mornings and stays on until they're ashamed into asking her to lunch with them. I'd not take a present of any of them."

"You are an anarchist," Clint said, smiling slowly. "Take off your gloves and I'll warm your hands." He drew off the worn leather gloves she wore, but as he held her hands he felt that they were warmer than his own.

"Did you see the look that girl who was talking to you gave me, when I was clearing out?" Miss Desmond asked with a laugh. "It would freeze a nation. And old Dun with her waved toupey, looking like nothing natural. I like Lord Duncarrig. He is as friendly as anything, and usually he asks me to dance at the Hunt Ball. But they don't never introduce."

Clint pressed her hands gently. "I made up my mind I'd get to know you," he said.

"Then you'll be in Lady D's black books," Georgie said with a wise nod of her head. "And as likely as not, I'll not see you again except in church."

"Come now, I think we can go one better than that," he replied, and he felt an overwhelming impulse to kiss her, but something held him back. She was ridiculously frank and artless, and it was rather mean to take advantage of her.

"How long are you stopping?" she said, throwing away the end of her cigarette.

"I shall be at Ardclare for another ten days," he said. "Have another cigarette?"

"I might," she replied, disengaging her hands while he produced his case again and gave her one.

"Couldn't I see you?" he asked. "Can't you invite me to tea?"

"Yes, that's the idea," she replied, and he gathered her hands back to his own again. "It's up to you to think of how you'll work it. I tell you I'm not liked. D'you know, I don't know what you're called."

"Clint," he said. "Eustace Clint."

Her eyes grew thoughtful. "I've never known a man called Eustace before," she said. "Charlies and Toms and Georges, of course, and once I knew an Ernest."

"Now, now," he drew a little closer, "you're counting scalps. I can tell that by the colour of your eyes."

"And you're wrong," she retorted. "Some of them were my cousins."

"Tell me heaps of things about yourself," he urged. "Only I warn you, I'm jealous."

"Cheek," she remarked laconically.

"No, a natural instinct. You are very pretty, Miss Georgie Desmond."

"And it's a pretty hour of the day to be sitting here with a fifteen mile ride before us, and the horses catching their death. Home, is our next address." She took her hands from his and picked up her gloves. "The rain is over, and the witches' cloak gone," she looked up at the cleared sky.

"Witches' cloak?" he said.

"Yes, that's what we call big rain clouds in these parts. You know very little."

"I'm fearfully innocent," he agreed, and he wondered again if he dared to kiss her. She was a queer mixture of the accessible and the inaccessible, and he did not want her to lose confidence in him. After all, there would be other opportunities if he managed well. So he got up and mounted Miss Desmond on her grey, without making the attempt.

They rode in single file down a narrow path which brought them to a lane, giving him room enough to ride along side of her. He was looking forward to a pleasant ten miles, during which he could improve the propitious opening of his acquaintance with Miss Desmond, but as they gained the road they were overtaken by a horseman riding a scraggy-looking black, whom Clint recognised as the noisy young man who had also been at Ardclare on his arrival.

"'Tis Milson Rogers," Georgie said, and he realised that she also was disappointed. "Well, Milson. How's the heel of the hunt?"

"God bless you, Georgie," he said sourly. "You think no one ever sees hounds, only yourself," and he jogged up between them. He was a determined talker of the hardy kind, who cared very little whether he was welcome or not, and he evidently had no wish to ingratiate himself with Clint, as he appeared to guess that Eustace could have done very well without him.

"Your hair's falling, Georgie," he remarked, when they had discussed the run at great length.

"Bother to it," Georgie put up her hand and endeavoured to make some attempt to tidy herself. "I declare I've often threatened I'd bob it, like the fashion plates in *Weldon's Journal*. Don't you think I'd look a fine cut if I did?"

"It's far too nice to spoil," Clint said, trying to catch her eye, and Milson Rogers gave a loud sniff of disdain.

"That one lives on flattery," he said, with a look at Clint. "Butter is what she likes."

"Then I'm sure she gets plenty of it." Eustace was growing bored with Rogers, and the miles were certainly very long.

They parted at the cross roads by the church, and Milson rode on with Georgie as his way lay in the direction of the Rectory. Eustace looked back, hoping that she would turn and wave her hand, but she did not.

Milson was ambling along beside her, and he sniffed again. "He's the cut of a barber's block, Georgie, and he'll only make a hare of you."

"It takes two to make hares," she retorted. "I'm not such a fool as you think me, Milson. It's very bad manners to be talking that way."

He rode up beside her and spoke, with a flushed, angry face. Milson had a large nose and eyes set a little too close together, and as Georgie looked at him, she thought him very ugly, for his carrot hair seemed positively to blaze.

"Have you forgotten all the talk about yourself and Simon Western?" he said. "'Simple Simon.' You'll go too far one of these days; a nice fool you looked when he cleared out."

Georgie favoured him with a steady stare, but her colour mounted slightly.

"Simon and I were great friends," she said, lifting her chin, "but no one can marry on air."

"Air? He meant nothing by it. After all, Georgie, I've been a good friend to you, and anyhow, I speak the truth."

"You're always saying ugly things, if that's friendship," she retorted.

"I'd be sorry to see you make a bad mistake," he remarked. "He'll laugh at you up at Ardclare, and the Duns are as down on you as a hundred of coal, as it is. I'm only advising you for your good."

Georgie seemed to reflect for a moment, and then she gave a little tinkle of laughter.

"I'd be obliged if you'd mind your own business, Milson, that's one complaint you'll never die of."

They had reached the outskirts of the village, and come to the Rectory gate, and Georgie dismounted and pushed it open.

The Rectory was a small, rather forlorn looking villa, with something the effect of having been transplanted from a London suburb; a mossy tennis lawn, and a few desolate flower-beds in front of the windows were enclosed behind a tattered thorn hedge. Rain had overflowed from the shoots and made long, dirty marks down the front of the house, and there was no evidence of care anywhere, for the Reverend Maurice Desmond "never noticed anything," and Georgie had no eye for detail. They were very poor, and the hunter she rode might be regarded as the only extravagance which conditions permitted.

When Mr. Desmond died Georgie would be left totally unprovided for, and had nothing to count upon except her chance of marriage. Her mother had been a woman of good family, but also quite penniless, and the Desmonds themselves were a distant branch of an ancient tree which had mouldered sorely with time. Mr. Desmond had become Rector of Ardclare when he was still a young man, and collected a heritage of debts which did not trouble him in the least. He admired his daughter immensely, felt sure that she would make a brilliant marriage, and beyond that, he did not speculate further. This attitude may have arisen from a sublime trust in Providence, or only have been a selfish wish to push the facts out of sight. He was habitually easygoing, and seldom opened his bills when they were presented. Every week he preached two sermons, taking them from a pile in the corner of his dark little study, as they followed in rotation. He had written them years before, but they did duty again and again, as he had long ceased to be interested in his own sermons. He was on good terms with his parishioners, who liked him, and frequently said of him that

he was "a gentleman," and his daughter provided them a fruitful source of gossip.

Since her earliest years, Georgie had made herself a target for the arrows of the critical or vindictive, and she certainly was, as Lady Duncarrig said, "so unsuitable."

She played the wheezy organ in the little church, and conducted choir practices, collecting all the available young men in the neighbourhood, because Georgie had an insatiable love of showing her power in this respect. Her up-bringing had been her own affair, and quite uncontrolled, so that her natural disregard of conventions was subjected to no restraint, and she began to flirt at an unusually early age.

There was something very beguiling about Georgie. Her high spirits and tremendous vitality made it easy for her to conquer, and it must be admitted that she was hardly fastidious. She was a warrior, too, in her way, and well aware of the strength of her foes, though she treated them with scant consideration. She knew that she must get married, and Miss White frequently lectured her on the folly of "spoiling her chances," while Mrs. Francis Dykes prophesied that she would come to no good. Others, as well as Lady Duncarrig, snubbed her and would have left her out, if it had not been for her father, and Georgie sometimes dreamed of a possible marriage which would place her in a position to square old scores.

She never analysed herself, or perhaps she might have been astonished at her own powers of falling a little in love; though no successful emotionalist is ever afraid of burnt fingers; but then none of the men who "meant it" were ever able to afford a wife, and Georgie was obviously not formed of the stuff which stands a long engagement. She had been unofficially engaged more than once, and then some one else came along, and she found a new subject, and so the chain of small affairs looked like lengthening interminably.

In the case of Simon Western, she had been really hard hit, and the watching circle of outside eyes observed the proceedings with unusual interest. He had come to the shabby old hotel in Ardclare, with a couple of hunters and attached himself to Georgie. Report had it, that he was to inherit a place and that vague thing, "a fortune" from an old uncle, but Simon was a dashing young man with very little of his own.

During the whole previous hunting season, he and Georgie had been the "talk of the world" as she put it, and when he left

and there was no announcement of the expected kind, Georgie had been more reckless and headlong than ever, and the prophets became extremely grim.

"It is fatal for a girl to get talked about," Mrs. Francis Dykes remarked so frequently that it became like a response to a Litany, and yet no one even knew what actually had happened.

"*Men* don't like it," Miss White said in warning tones; "Georgie will go too far, and *I* for one, should be sorry."

But, how to stop Georgie? No one had arrived at that. She "got hold of people," so it was said, and her reputation did not discourage fresh young men from following in the train.

Perhaps the real explanation evaded even those who were her captives, who, after all, were not so foolish as they appeared.

Georgie was very young, and still undeveloped, and though Ardclare generally believed that they knew her, it was possible that no one did know her, least of all, herself. She blazed like a fire in the open, and drew people towards her by a kind of natural warmth, and all that most people know of fires, is, that if they boil saucepans, it is a creditable achievement.

Yet she inspired real love; the hopelessly insolvent young men who might have married her, were aware of something about Georgie that they treasured long after in thought, when they had gone away and she had forgotten them. She kissed them in farewell, and forgot that she had ever done so; there was nothing straight-laced about her, and as for her poor reputation, she disregarded it.

There were men who had not understood, and who had done her incalculable harm in the eyes of "the world," for Ardclare was her world, since she never left it. . . .

Some day, everyone felt, she would get into serious trouble.

CHAPTER III

GEORGIE led Garryowen round to the stables at the back of the Rectory and handed him over to Jimmy, the man-of-all-work, giving him a spirited account of the run.

She was rather excited, for she had a feeling that Clint was going to provide her with some fun. The cannibal in Georgie was awakened, and Clint was, outwardly at least, the type of man she admired. His clothes and the thin gold cigarette-case he carried, his loud, well-bred voice, and a kind of ruthlessness of manner appealed to her imagination, and besides this, he was staying with the Duns, and Lady Dun would be properly scored off, if Georgie Desmond manœuvred him away from the stick of a girl in breeches. Georgie considered it very shameless of her to appear in such clothes, and she was quite shocked at the thought.

When she left the stables, where Jimmy was clapping his hands together in an enthusiasm of applause, for he adored Miss Georgie, she went into the house through the kitchen, and was caught into the smell of aromatic preparations for supper. She put her head round the kitchen door, and spoke to Katie Love, the general servant.

"I'm fearfully hungry, Katie," she said. "Is there an egg in the bowl? If there is, bring it in when you make the tea."

"There's not an egg in it," Katie replied from the kitchen range, where she was hammering violently. "And there's not so much as a crumb of the cake left. The rats has ate it."

"Then bread and butter will do," Georgie replied cheerfully. "Is Dada in?"

"He's in since he had his dinner ate," Katie remarked, pushing back a wisp of dark hair. "We had Miss White here, and she's here still, but I held back from wetting the tea until yourself would come."

Georgie withdrew from the door, and went up a narrow back stairs, bare of any carpet, leading into a small passage, and thence to a hall which was blocked by a large erection stuck all over with pegs, and hung with coats and hats. A steel en-

graving of a bishop looked down benignly upon the general debris, and she threw her hunting-crop down on a table, which was crowded with papers and string, and covered with dust.

Opening one of the three narrow doors of the hall, Georgie burst into the drawing-room, where Miss White was sitting in a basket-chair by the fire, and Mr. Desmond was seated a little distance from an empty table covered with a tea-cloth trimmed around with tattered lace.

"Oh, here you are, Georgie," her father said, looking relieved. He was a weary old man, with thin, mournful features and a general effect of steady decline about him. His black clothes were never brushed, he wore his hair rather long and lying flat over his large head.

"Yes, here I am," Georgie put her hands on Miss White's shoulders and bent to kiss her.

"And you have been smoking out of doors," Miss White remarked. "Georgie, dear, I don't think you should."

"Nor do I," added Mr. Desmond.

"You never see Lady Duncarrig with a cigarette in her mouth," Miss White continued. "And she knows what is done, and what isn't."

"Does she, then?" Georgie replied. "Well, I can't be moulding myself on th' Ardclare lot. It's too much fash; anyway, I don't see why I need."

At that moment there was a bump against the door, and Katie staggered in, carrying a heavy tray.

"Th' egg's for Miss Georgie," she said, with a revengeful look towards Miss White. "'Tis poached."

"Where did you get it?" Georgie asked. "You're an old dear, Katie."

"From under the grey hen," Katie snapped. "Himself is a fine little layer."

Miss White ignored the conversation, which she felt to be hopelessly out of order. The only way to deal with such a complete absence of any sense of what should happen in a lady's drawing-room was to pretend that it was not taking place.

"Th' egg is for Miss Georgie," Katie repeated again, as she left the room with a good deal of clatter, for she had an inward conviction that Miss White would insist upon eating it herself.

"Come, my dear, and pour out the tea," Mr. Desmond said in a less weary voice. "Did you have a good day's sport?"

Georgie took up her place at the tea-table and began to fill the

cups with steaming dark-brown tea, and then, her mouth full of bread and butter, she commenced a vivid description of the run. The find had been phenomenally rapid, and she dwelt with some length upon the details of the line they had followed.

"I saw Lady Duncarrig driving home, and she invited me back for lunch," Miss White said, with a touch of conscious pride. "She finds my advice very useful."

"Ah, yes," Mr. Desmond agreed, "it is a great thing that Lady Duncarrig interests herself in our little affairs, though sometimes, I must say, I wish she would take more of your advice, Miss White."

"Miss Stuart was back early," Miss White continued. "She had trouble with a stirrup's leather, and was nearly thrown."

"She to be thrown!" Georgie ejaculated. "Not likely."

"She is very elegant," Miss White said admiringly.

"Then I think she might wear a skirt," Georgie retorted. "It looks awfully bad, the way she is. I declare I can't think how she can."

"It is done." Miss White handed her tea-cup back to Georgie. "I hear the most particular people of all do it now. If Lady Duncarrig does not disapprove, I see no reason why you should, Georgie; though in some ways I agree that it is hardly lady-like."

"Clint, the fellow that's staying at Ardclare, can't endure Miss Stuart," Georgie said triumphantly.

Mr. Desmond got up, and said that he must go and write some letters, which statement was a harmless fiction, as he never did anything of the kind. In fact it would be hard to say what Mr. Desmond really did do with his time. He was one of those people who saw no reason to hurry. And even if he had wished to work, there was almost nothing of a professional nature for him to concentrate upon. His parish was formed of what he called "a carriage congregation," and you do not talk—or at least Mr. Desmond did not—to your neighbours about the state of their souls. He was well into the autumn of life, and some of the stillness of the season had overtaken his mind, and he had come to the conclusion that more harm is done by interfering with people than by leaving them alone.

Somewhere, in the back of his mind, he was aware that Georgie was not an ideal clergyman's daughter, but he decided that it was not possible to alter her. He was mildly interested in local gossip, and if he stood little chance of being saved by

works, he certainly never harmed anyone. He was invariably polite and patient, and Miss White had been more or less on his mind for years, because he knew that if he asked her she would marry him, and he had long ago decided that he would never marry again.

He faded out of the room, and Georgie threw a cushion on the floor, seating herself in front of the fire.

"Did old Dun say anything about Clint?" she asked.

"Georgie, darling, do speak of that gentleman as *Captain* Clint," Miss White said reprovingly.

"Very well, then. Did she?"

Lady Duncarrig had never mentioned Eustace, further than to ask, in an exhausted voice, what Veronica had done with him, for she had returned alone with Lord Duncarrig; but Miss White had her own fictions, and one of them was that she knew everything that passed in the minds of the owners of Ardclare. Georgie more or less believed that Lady Dun opened her heart to Miss White, and that there was a real intimacy between them.

"I understand," Miss White said with a touch of reserve, "that Captain Clint was in charge of Miss Stuart. I don't know that there is any *actual* engagement, but there is an understanding."

"There's several sorts of understandings," Georgie remarked, taking up the poker and prodding a burning log until a shower of sparks flew up the chimney.

"I feel sure," Miss White resumed, "that there will be an engagement, even if it is not announced at once."

"What'll you bet me?" Georgie put her head on one side and looked up. "A packet of Gold Flakes against the new hymn-book Dada gave me on my birthday, that it never comes off."

Miss White shook her head. "In any case I wouldn't encourage you in your love for tobacco," she said reprovingly, "and I warn you, Georgie, that you won't be doing a wise thing if you make mischief."

"Who's talking of making mischief?"

"As it is," Miss White went on, "Lady Duncarrig doesn't approve of you, and all that talk there was about you and Simon Western made things worse. If you do do anything with Captain Clint, Lady Duncarrig will be furious."

"Tell me something new," Georgie remarked scornfully.

"I'm speaking for your good. To be out with the Duncar-

rigs will be bad for you socially, and it's easily seen that the match is arranged."

"He's coming to tea," Georgie said with a laugh. "And 'twasn't me asked him. He said he'd come, and I couldn't be so ugly as to refuse him, could I now?"

"Yes, you could." Miss White was obviously nervous. "It's madness, Georgie. Won't you ever have sense?"

"Not if I live to be seventy," Georgie said with conviction. "It's so dull. If you and Dada had your way, I'd never cross the road, and all the fun I ever get is by being foolish—and perhaps I'm not the fool after all. Clint's very rich, I suppose?"

"Very," Miss White agreed, knowing nothing whatever about it.

"Well, if he likes me better than Miss Stuart, what harm?"

Miss White pursed up her mouth and remained silent. She considered it unlikely that Clint would swerve from the suitable engagement Lady Duncarrig had made for him, and yet she knew Georgie's will-o'-the-wisp powers of leading people into a dance which ended nowhere, certainly not at the altar, which was her idea of a satisfactory conclusion to all such affairs. Clint might have been "taken" by Georgie, for so many men had, and it would merely give Lady Duncarrig yet another reason for disliking the girl. She was sincerely fond of Georgie, and was extremely good-natured, so that there was nothing she wished for more truly than to see her suitably married. She regarded marriage as the one unfailing remedy, and though, or because she had missed the experience herself, was convinced of its magical qualities. The addition of a plain gold ring to the third finger of the left hand caused the Ethiopian to change her skin, and the leopard her spots.

If Georgie could be got married, she would then settle down, and her predatory instinct would vanish as she rocked a cradle and ruled the world. Miss White had a feeling that young Rogers really meant it, and that if Georgie gave up this dangerous game, she might be converted and transformed by the quite simple process of signing her name "Rogers."

Milson was not a good match, but any sort of match was obviously better than none. He lived with a hot-tempered old lady whom he called "me grandmother," and had a small house and a bit of land. "Me Grandmother" would be a difficult person to share a roof with, but she was not immortal and might be

expected to die some day. So long as Georgie allowed herself to be dazzled by Eustace Clint, she would never look at Milson, and Miss White was quite unhappy at the thought.

"Be sensible, Georgie," she said heavily. "I was young once, and I refused more than one good man, because I thought that Sir Willum Rafter meant all he said. Look at Constance Ashford. She was the most beautiful girl in the county, and what is she now? Living in some flat in London, and I'm told she's as bad tempered as her mother was before her, and not sixpence to bless herself with. I hear she has to work."

The real sorrow she felt at such a fate overtaking one of her own early friends, distressed Miss White.

"She was always dull. No life in her," Georgie said reflectively, comparing her own chances with those of the erstwhile beauty. "Looks are all very fine, but you need a good pinch of gunpowder as well."

"Blind," Miss White said, quoting Dickens quite unconsciously. "Blind, blind."

"Well, are you taking my bet?" Georgie asked, with a revival of spirit. "He's awfully nice, Miss White, and has a lovely cigarette-case made of gold."

"If you go too far, I shall speak to your fawther," Miss White said, collecting a cloak with a thick fur collar. "Keep in with the Duncarrigs, it will pay you best in the end."

"What upset things between you and the other man?"

"Sir Willum? Some one made mischief. It's very easy to make mischief, and that is what I hope you won't do."

Miss White appeared to be strangling herself as she fastened her cloak, and then she kissed Georgie on both cheeks, and turned majestically to the door. She had done what she could for the motherless girl who so badly needed management.

"You'll not go telling on me to Dada?" Georgie said with a little touch of wistfulness. She was used to sparing Dada as far as she could in most things, and was prepared to face the consequences of her acts alone. Dada lived in a dream world, composed, it is true, of rather dull dreams, but very far from reality, and it made him dignified. He never "let on" that he was anxious for her to get married, and he steered his course through the autumn fogs quite admirably. It was known that he must not be worried, and the exactions this attitude implied were endless. From the butcher with his bill, to Lady Duncarrig and her disapproval, all must be kept at bay or covered up so that

Dada might continue his dreams undisturbed. If Dada were to be really agitated, no one could picture the results, but it was generally believed that it would be the death of him.

Miss White covered her face with a shawl, and went out into the misty darkness of the night. She lived at "Barnane," a rose-covered, square-built house about a mile farther up the road, in company with an unmarried brother who had slipped down the precipice of gentility and was never spoken of. He was credited with having made a left-handed alliance with the cook, and only Miss White's powers of ignoring all that should not exist made it possible for her to carry off the situation.

She belonged to the generation who refused realism, and pretended almost gloriously. Had she given in to facts, she would have been an unhappy survival of lost days, but she never did accept any fact until she had dressed it up and made it presentable. Fundamentally a generous and warm-hearted woman, she hung up her tapestries of fiction around her. She was Lady Duncarrig's greatest friend; she was the main influence in the life of Mr. Desmond, who had never asked her to be his wife in case she might refuse him, and Ardclare was to her, as to Georgie, "the world."

Georgie watched her go, and then, closing the door, she called to Katie that she could clear away the tea. Then she climbed the steep staircase to her own room, where the bed had not yet been made, and where her clothes were tumbled about over chairs in abandoned disorder.

It did not distress her in the least; she struck a match and took up a candle which had been used to assist in lighting a fire and was black and sooty round the wick, glancing at her own reflection in the small looking-glass.

Pulling off her boots and flinging her habit on the floor, she heaped her mud-stained clothes in a corner, and put on a velvet jumper and a serge skirt. With a few brief and energetic movements she threw the clothes back over the bed and began to arrange her hair in front of the glass. She knew that she was attractive, for she had been told so too often for her to doubt the truth of the assertion, but she did not admire her own style. She wished that she was tall and pale, with red hair and green eyes, for she had read of such charms and they appealed to her, and she felt suddenly that she would like to have gold boxes on her dressing-table, and expensive face powder that cost a fortune to buy.

It was a wretched thing to be always poor, and never be able to go to Madame Murphy, in the Grand Parade in Cork, for evening gowns, which represented the wildest height of extravagance in her mind. It was miserable not to have a new habit of purple striped cloth with a velvet collar, and to be aware that your boots did you no credit whatever. Dada had no money, so it was no use telling him about these things. He would only groan aloud and say that he was pestered by demands for payments of all kinds. If you had no money, you simply could not buy clothes, but it would be splendid to have a really becoming hat, one which you had not trimmed yourself and could believe in.

When would she marry? Until she did, there was no way out of the hopeless, careless life, pleasant though it was; and Georgie thought over the question.

She had had a really surprising number of suitors, but that was all no real use. In some odd way she felt very sincerely that she owed it to Dada to get herself off his mind. Besides, marriage was an adventure and one had to chance it.

"I wish to God I could marry you, Georgie," Simon Western had said, but then every one knows that if wishes were horses, beggars would ride, and—there was no use thinking of Simon.

From her mournful reflections, Georgie travelled on suddenly to the adventure of the day with Clint. Some instinct in her warned her that Clint was not exactly the man to "fool around with," as Milson Rogers had suggested. He was assured, and seemed to expect instant capitulation from her, and he belonged to the rich, pagan world, where many of the people seemed wonderfully heartless and unkind. Lady Dun, for instance; Georgie was only a girl, and yet Lady Dun never lost a chance of making her look small.

All these people paid fortunes for their clothes, and didn't care about anyone except themselves. They put on airs and were nasty to outsiders. Georgie knew that they ridiculed her whenever she went to Ardclare. Yet she felt that they would not trouble to do all this if it were not that they regarded her as a personality in some way. Her face burned and her eyes grew hard and angry. What right had they to trample like elephants over the feelings of others? She lifted her chin, and glared at herself almost as though she were having it out with Lady Dun.

Clint might be a dangerous plaything, but to wrest him from

the clutches of the self-satisfied Veronica would have its joys, even if he never came within reach of what Georgie called "the scratch." That she could ever bring him up to the scratch seemed extremely improbable.

She got up and wandered to the window, pulling back the withered serge curtain that hung over it, and leaned out. A sense came to her of having reached some invisible landmark, and of being swept past it. Fancy getting away from Ardclare and the people who knew everything she had ever done since she was a child. Censorious people who were always abusing her among themselves. Getting away from the little street, where money was owed in every shop, and going out into life. The few times she had managed to go to Dublin were rare, and she always came back. She had never been to England, and London was nothing but a name of power. Yet there was London, and another place which she called "Pars" where life ran high; to have been there even once added a *cachet* to things. Miss White had been to London twice, and said she had been to Pars, but no one was quite clear as to the facts; anyhow, she spoke of "the boulevards" now and then.

Georgie had once said to Dada that she would like to see the world, and he had told her that so would he, but he had to deny himself, and Georgie had a vague notion that if it were not for her, Dada might be sitting in a first-class carriage, on his way to Monte Carlo. Poor Dada.

The night had cleared, and the moon was nearly full as it silvered the trees which bordered the road, and a little flock of clouds white as sheep lay quietly to the west, far, and incredibly far from the earth. In the cold light, Georgie's face looked anxious and worried, but she pulled back the curtain quickly, and rehearsed her conversation with Clint.

If he came to tea, she would be excited and elated, and meantime she remembered young Mr. Finney was bidden to supper. He was the new Protestant engineer employed by the Local Government Board, and always said "Ta" instead of "Thank you," which Georgie thought rather a charming little mannerism.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Georgie had sung to Mr. Finney, and Mr. Finney had sung to Georgie, he went away. He had got on very well at supper, and Mr. Desmond seemed to like him; he even invited him to come again, and Mr. Finney accepted the invitation with alacrity, and at last Mr. Desmond saw him out at the front door, and chained it up for the night.

Georgie was pushing away the tattered sheets of music, and the echoes of Mr. Finney's tenor still seemed to hang in the small room. The pink wax candles which lighted the crazy old piano guttered down, and she extinguished them, as Mr. Desmond removed some half-burnt logs from the fire.

"Finney is a nice young man," Mr. Desmond said, in a subdued, guarded voice. "He has, I'm told, private means besides his salary, and he may get a job of very much greater importance."

"He's the greatest fun," Georgie agreed readily, banging down the top of the piano. "I wonder why he wears his watch-chain across his chest? He's to take the solo at Christmas. I said I'd coax him, Dada, and he was all over it at once," she yawned. "We want a baritone to drown Mrs. Francis."

"I am glad Mr. Finney is taking the solo," Mr. Desmond said. "I like Finney." Again he lowered his eyes.

"He sings very well if he'd only keep in tune," Georgie commented uncritically. "Reely well."

"I am no judge," Mr. Desmond admitted, and then he began to look at the pictures on the walls, not that they were works of art, but he was feeling a little self-conscious.

"I'd like to see you settled," he said abstractedly; "you have always been my first care, Georgie. Young people do not realise the anxiety they are to their parents."

"Is it you want to get shut of me?" she asked half playfully, "and you're thinking that Finney would be a good proposition? He's not asked me yet, dada, and it's manners to wait till you're asked."

"I don't think anything at all about Finney," Mr. Desmond

said hastily. "But I do think, that with all these young men you ought to show some principle, Georgie."

She put her hand on his arm. He had disowned any idea of thrusting Finney down her throat, and she thought it was very kind and delicate on his part. She even believed that he meant nothing at all by what he had said.

"One of these days," she said soothingly, as though she were speaking to a child. "Only, somehow, I don't think it will be Finney."

"He's a regular communicant and a thoroughly well educated young man," Mr. Desmond said plaintively, as Georgie steered him into the hall, impressed by her own inability to meet his wishes, and very regretful that it was so. "It's time you thought seriously of undertaking the responsibilities of life."

"Oh, Dada, give me half a chance," she said as she lighted his candle for him. "I'm not as old as all that, surely? Am I now?"

"It is of your own happiness I am thinking," Mr. Desmond said. "I am always considering that, Georgie."

"Indeed and don't I know it?" she kissed him affectionately, her eyes a little moist.

She patted his dusty black coat, and then looked back again at Mr. Desmond from her door.

"One of these days," she said again, "I'll do great things, Dada. Never you worry."

But his expression was that of a discouraged crow, and he did not return her smile.

The week which followed was an uneventful one for Georgie, in the sense that nothing seemed to happen to her personally. She heard of a small dance at Ardclare, to which she was not invited, and the omission was cruel, because Georgie loved dancing and also it placed her very definitely outside the favoured circle who were accorded the distinction of being among the invited guests. Milson Rogers went, and brought Georgie an account of the proceedings. Mrs. Francis Dykes had been bidden, and sat looking on at the fashionable dances, enlarging her mind, even though she felt slightly shocked. Miss White explained her own absence, and said that Lady Duncarrig liked to have her when she was alone, and would not, of course, think of sweeping her in with those whom she regarded only as acquaintances. Mr. Finney was not asked, but then he did not call at Ardclare, so that he could not have expected "crowns to

fall," and the fact that Georgie had also not been invited was more than a consolation to him.

From Milson Rogers, Georgie learnt that Miss Stuart had danced most of the evening with Clint, as she only knew the very latest dances. Duncarrig, who was not very modern, still waltzed round and round, and found plenty of partners who only did the same. Clint and Miss Stuart had looked very remarkable, and when he was not dancing with Veronica, he played bridge. Apparently he had not been introduced to the girls of the neighbourhood, and had made no effort to get to know any of them.

"He's booked through with Miss Stuart," Milson said with unmistakable satisfaction, and Georgie felt unaccountably depressed and dissatisfied. It was bad to be left out of the few gaieties which ever took place in Ardclare, but it might have been worse to have gone there only to watch Clint performing intricate steps with the superior Miss Stuart.

Worse than this, Garryowen was laid up with a strained hock, and there was no hope of getting to the next meet.

Georgie wished she could forget Clint and find some one else to feel interested in, but no such alternative was at hand. November had brought with it a whole flock of bills, which lay in an increasing pile on Mr. Desmond's writing table. A clerical meeting was pending, and Georgie felt sure that if Clint ever came at all, he would choose that inauspicious day. By the end of the week, she had begun to conquer the ache that had made her acutely miserable, and had given up squandering eggs to prepare a fresh cake each afternoon, while Kate reproached her for needless extravagance, obviously suspecting her activities, and complaining loudly because she would light the drawing-room fire. Clint was not coming at all, and had only been fooling.

And then, quite unexpectedly, the day before the clerical meeting, he walked in.

No preparations had been made and Georgie, who had seen him from an upper window, was divided in mind whether she would run down and stick a match into the drawing-room grate, or change into her velvet jumper. She did neither; and, conscious of a lack of finish in her personal appearance, and a cold, rather musty smell in the air of the drawing-room, came into the room with a funny little fluttering feeling at her heart. Clint looked superlatively well brushed and polished, and she

thought again how nice it must be to know that you were right, down to the last detail. She had caught her foot in the hem of her skirt as she came downstairs, and was aware that she had a trail of torn braid depending desolately from behind, as she advanced towards him.

"It's awfully cold, isn't it?" she said. "Have you a match?"

He felt in his waistcoat pocket and produced a box full of stout expensive wax vestas which burnt like candles, and they knelt on the shabby old hearthrug together. But Katie was not an adept at laying fires, and the business of getting it to light was long, difficult and dirty. Georgie got a black smut on her cheek in the process, and it was only with the help of the ends of the pink piano candles that they induced the sticks to burn.

Clint was amused by the proceedings. Ardclare and Miss Stuart combined had bored him dreadfully, and he watched Georgie's animated face as she bent forward, encouraging the starved flame and blowing at it carefully.

She was uncommonly pretty, and he had made several efforts to get to her during the week, but he knew that Lady Duncarrig suspected him, and there had been quite a heated argument between her and Duncarrig over the question of asking Georgie to the dance. Duncarrig had appealed, with great lack of tact, to Clint, and dragged him into the controversy, when he had admitted that he thought she should have had an invitation. Since then, Lady Duncarrig had never lost an opportunity of thwarting his plans, and, whether by accident or design he could not say, she had never given him a single free hour.

That very afternoon he had been obliged to lie so as to escape; and if she discovered his mendacity he knew that he would at once become suspect to her.

That morning, John Lousada had turned up at Ardclare and created a diversion. Even Veronica had been less coldly persistent in her determination to make Clint dance attendance on her, and Lousada diverted the main attention from Eustace. He was understood to be an explorer, and had written a book, and some side wind had blown him into Ireland, though no one ever knew what he was really up to, or why he appeared or disappeared.

Clint took no interest in him, only, just then, he was glad he had come, because it gave him a holiday.

He looked at Georgie's profile, and thought it very attractive. She had a fascinating nose, tilted up just a shade, and the black

smudge on her face heightened her charm, so that he made a sudden dive forward and kissed her.

She did not seem angry, but she evaded a repetition of the salute and drew away.

"Go on, now," she said. "And you as good as engaged to Miss Stuart. Oughtn't you to be ashamed of yourself?"

"I'm *not* engaged to Miss Stuart. I'd rather kiss the work-house gate than kiss her," he replied emphatically. "Why do you want to make out that I'm such a fool?"

"It's common talk," Georgie replied. "Every one here has it."

"Then they are telling lies," he caught her hand. "Every single day this week I've tried to come and see you, and simply couldn't do it. Will you believe that?"

Georgie winked at him, and sat back on her heels.

"You must have been deadly keen to be so easy put off," she said. "But now I'll ring for the tea."

"Not yet," he said, as she took a battered black hearth brush and held it lance-wise before her; "put down that brush. Won't you be a little kind to me?"

"And you two, dancing like people on the stage, so I was told; gazing and gazing; and every one admiring the pair of you."

"I wasn't gazing. I had to dance with the girl because she can't waltz." He was obviously becoming vexed and hot. "If you'd been there I would have danced with you, Georgie."

"Georgie, indeed! Who gave you leave to call me that?"

"I did myself."

"And how'd you know that I'd dance with you? But, anyhow, I wasn't asked at all!"

"Lady Duncarrig is a shrew," he said, getting up, and Georgie raised herself and sat in a chair.

"I'll recover," she said, with a toss of her head. "I've still a few friends in the world, Captain Clint, even if I don't never go t'Ardclare again."

"Call me Eustace," he said. "It's so formal for you to speak to me as if I were a stranger."

He sat down and stretched out his legs; the fire was burning gaily, and in the light of the flames danced along the walls of the dark little room. Outside, the wind was blowing shatters of yellow leaves from a lime tree, and they made a dry pattering sound like the fall of snow. He had a sense of being cut off

from the world he knew in company with a girl who was able to make him feel astonishingly alive and interested.

Veronica Stuart was undeniably "suitable," and Georgie was not; but at that moment he had an impulse to do what he liked himself. A kind of "damn the consequences" mood, which very nearly startled him. Clint had avoided marriage as some men avoided drink, and he regarded it as a state which demanded a great deal to make it worth while. Of course he couldn't marry Georgie. The general opinion seemed to be that no one could, and he remembered Duncarrig's remark:

"I wonder who Georgie Desmond will marry?" and his wife's reply: "You *should* say, 'I wonder who will marry her?'"

Yet Georgie was undeniable. Even though she had been so constantly belittled to him, he admitted that she was strong in her own inexplicable charm. Badly dressed, quite unequipped for social battles, and oddly unsophisticated. She hadn't a penny, and she was nobody. A clergyman's daughter seemed to be in a strange position, and without special status of any kind. Then, she had been talked of in a way which did her no good, and if she managed to marry the loud, red-haired young man who had been at the dance, she would not be doing too badly. All this was an echo of Lady Duncarrig's attitude. For Clint to think even for a moment that Georgie would be a possible wife was little short of a miracle; and yet he did think of it.

"Eustace," she repeated. "What a stuck-up kind of a name your godfathers and godmothers gave you."

"I was christened after an uncle," he explained. "He left me a place near Oxford called 'the Gleanings.'"

For a moment his mind was occupied with the recollection of his own house with its rose-red walls and brown roof, and the terraced garden; the good stables, and the rather dull life he had to lead when he was there. It would be much duller if he brought Veronica Stuart into the picture.

"And what sort of a place is it?" she asked.

"Oh, a so-so sort of place. Nothing like Ardclare, for instance, but it's very comfy." He smiled a lazy smile at her. "Stabling for six and a garage. I only run to a small car. There's good hunting enough, and a bit of glass, so that I grow my own pineapples."

Georgie sighed, a fleeting little sigh of envy. "It's well to be you," she said. "And now will you pull the bell and we'll have tea."

He got up, but he did not ring, and once more he stood smiling down at her. "You're awfully attractive," he said.

"I know that," Georgie replied, her outward indifference covering the queer frightened beating of her heart. She had been through many affairs, and yet she always felt the same exhilaration in them. Clint gave it to her now, though she knew it was foolish to suppose that he meant anything; and then there was Dada, and the necessity for some one to mean something.

He stood half doubtfully, thinking that she was rather spoiled and too sure of herself, when the moment was snatched from him by the appearance of the tea itself and the red, angry face of Kate, who had nothing to offer a guest but bread and butter, and suffered from a sense of wrath in case the gentleman might scorn them all, because there was no cake.

"Here is the tea," Georgie said, getting up and dragging the table forward.

"How long are you adorning Ardclare?" she asked when the table was spread, and Clint looked at her over the cups and saucers.

"I'm to adorn it for another week," he replied. "After that, the Duncarrigs go to London for Christmas."

"And you'll go t'England? D'you know, I've never been t'England?"

"By Jove!" He was intensely amused at the idea. That is strange. How you will love seeing London."

"If ever I go there," her eyes clouded. "Sometimes I think that I shall live and die in Ardclare and never get beyond it."

"Not you!" He seemed quite sure of this.

"Oh, 'not you' is all very well; but I don't know."

"I have thought," Clint looked away from her animated face, "that as I like the hunting here, I'd take a room at the hotel and stay on until New Year. They are making some alterations at 'The Gleanings,' so it won't be quite ready."

Her face was so ridiculously expressive when taken unaware, that Georgie could not disguise the pleasure she felt at the idea. Clint at the hotel: able to come and go without a warder of such iron cast as Lady Duncarrig, able to drop in, as others had done; and then the days in the open, with the added excitement of meeting him beyond the Rectory gate, and the rides home together.

"That would be simply grand," she said.

"Would it? You mean that? You'll be kind to me if I do stay on?"

"Heffernan could hire you a good couple of screws," she continued, not answering him; "you'd be comfortable there, and they are used to taking in officers."

"Then at the end of a week I shall simply move my quarters," he said, and again he watched her face.

"Whatever'll Lady Dun say?" Georgie burst into a peal of laughter. "I bet she'll be as cross as the cats."

"I don't care. Why should I?"

"No, indeed, why should you, and you as independent as you are," she replied fervently.

"I will go and arrange it on my way back," he said; "and I ought to be moving, Georgie."

"Can you sing?" she asked suddenly.

"Why?" he asked, in some surprise. "Are you trying to change the conversation, or what?"

"Only seeking a baritone in 'For unto us,'" Georgie said enthusiastically. "Finney is a tenor and I'm at me wit's end to gather in a baritone."

"I'll sing in the chorus, nothing else," he said firmly; "and when is it?"

"It's th'anthem. I play th'organ," Georgie spoke faster and faster. "On Christmas Day we have 'For unto us,' and we want Mrs. Francis Dykes drowned."

"I'll drown her, if she annoys you," he laughed. "Only it's rather unkind."

"Oh! the relief!" Georgie sank back in her chair. "You don't know how I have been bothered for a baritone."

"You won't expect me to sing solos, or anything awful like that?" he asked, and he got up and caught her hand over the table. "I'd do a lot for you, Georgie, but not that, and I'll only sing if you'll pay me for it."

His face was close to hers and again he was just about to kiss her when she pushed him back, as a door banged.

"That's Dada coming in," she said. "Behave nicely now, Eustace, and don't go calling me Georgie before Dada. He mightn't like it, you see."

"Of course I won't," Clint stood up; "but I must clear out, anyhow. What are you doing to-morrow?"

"Is it to-morrow?" Georgie groaned. "We have a clerical

meeting here, and I'll be in the kitchen all day. The way they eat would break your heart."

"What do they do?" he demanded with a puzzled frown.

"Argue with themselves. To-morrow they're to have a row over th'Immaculate Conception, I believe."

It seemed extremely piquant to think of Georgie's strange clerical background, as Clint looked at her, and it added in some way to her mystery. He did not exactly know what he thought of clergymen, except that he always avoided them on principle, but it intensified the strangeness of everything connected with Georgie Desmond.

Mr. Desmond came into the room, and Georgie introduced Clint to her father.

"Dada, here's salvation for th'anthem," she said gaily. "Captain Clint will take the baritone part, so we're all right. He will be at the hotel at Christmas."

Mr. Desmond shook hands quite cordially, his eyes on the ground.

"I am happy to learn it. The choir is always a difficult problem," and as he sat down and took a teacup from his daughter, he looked at Clint and then looked away again. There was something familiar about what Georgie would have called "the cut" of Clint. Men such as he had been there before this, and Mr. Desmond was aware that to build upon them, was to follow in the footsteps of the man who built his house on the sand.

"Who is this Captain Clint?" he asked fretfully, as Georgie returned after a rather prolonged parting at the door.

"He was at Ardclare the day we called," she said, "Look Dada, I've saved you a weeshy little drop of cream for your tea."

"Ah!" Mr. Desmond remarked enigmatically.

"Oh, no end of a fellow, Dada. A place of his own in England, and very nice, too."

But though Mr. Desmond said nothing, he was obviously displeased, and the droop of his shoulders intensified the dejection which the advent of Clint had brought with him. He did not continue the conversation, but turned to the subject of the clerical meeting.

CHAPTER V

THE great thing in life is to have something to look forward to, and we most of us live in the future. Georgie was no exception to the general rule, and once she felt that Clint was really coming to the hotel for over a month, she was no longer at the mercy of the passing days, and her rather husky little voice raised itself in song as she went about the house. Another excitement was provided for her, and brought with it a real thrill, for the Duncarrigs were giving an afternoon party to which every one in Ardclare was invited, and Georgie took an anxious thought about the dress she was to wear.

Even in Ardclare, clothes were a prohibitive price, and the thought of getting anything from Madame Murphy was hopelessly out of the question. Every one was busy getting something new for the occasion, and Miss White became suddenly reckless and went off to Cork, returning with a wonderful creation the cost of which was little short of staggering.

"I owe it to Lady Duncarrig," she said, but Mrs. Francis Dykes remarked acidly, that she owed, and was likely to go on owing for it, to the shop where it was bought.

Amid so much magnificence, Georgie felt that she would cut rather a sorry figure, but it did not trouble her over much. She had discovered that attraction is a queer, subtle attribute, and is independent of wrappings—if you have enough of it. Behind the allure of well-made clothes there was a need for something further. Even to be beautiful was not at all sufficient, or to have a conquering air; success in these things defeats any attempt at explanation, so she put on her shabby little "best," with the hat which originally affronted Clint, and set off with Dada.

Lady Duncarrig had decided to do the thing thoroughly when she gave her party. She regarded it as a penance which had to be performed, and on this occasion she left no one out, not even Mr. Finney, who had never been inside Ardclare; and she stood near the door of the large drawing-room and shook hands with her guests, her eyes upon some point just over their heads, so

that they received the impression of being greeted by a rather successful wax work from Madame Tussaud's.

Tea, coffee, and refreshments of a light kind were provided in the dining-room, and Lady Duncarrig felt that once she had welcomed her guests, if such a word can be used in such a connection, the least they could do was to carry-on for themselves. There were so many of them, and the crush was so great, that no special treatment could be expected by individuals, though Miss White found a chair close to where Lady Duncarrig stood, and constituted herself a kind of second hostess. She signalled to any arrivals whom she wished to encourage and asked them if they had seen Lord Duncarrig, adding that, "Tea was in the dining-room," so that many of them felt she was an accredited deputy, and as the afternoon wore on, and Lady Duncarrig left her post at the drawing-room door, Miss White herself received late-comers, and said that Lady Duncarrig wished them to be told that "Tea was in the dining-room." In this way the occasion was one of her greatest successes, and when Lord Duncarrig eventually wandered towards her, like a lost sheep, and took her in to tea himself, she was fully rewarded for her defiant gamble in clothes, particularly as Duncarrig said in his hearty way that she was the best-dressed woman in the room.

Georgie and Mr. Desmond arrived punctually, and Lady Duncarrig received her with a further elevation of her eyes and a more limp touch of her hand, and when Mr. Desmond hesitated and appeared anxious to say something, she passed him and his daughter onwards immediately, like a good juggler disposing of cards in a card trick. Miss White greeted them cordially, and said she was glad to see them, and then they were amalgamated in the throng beyond. They knew almost every one present, and nearly all the clergymen who had been at the clerical meeting were already there, so they forsook their wives and daughters and gathered into a knot, where they talked and laughed rather aimlessly, for, truth to tell, no one knew exactly what they were expected to do next.

Having lost Dada, who was engaged in a discussion with a neighbouring archdeacon, Georgie looked around her, and recognised Mr. Finney, alone and rather forlorn. A dread seized her that he would certainly attach himself to her, and she deliberately made her way in the opposite direction, taking cover in a window seat, where she was out of the way. She felt that it could only be a matter of moments before Clint would

find her, and the real pleasure of the party begin. She saw him easily, as he was well over the heads of most of the crowd, and she noticed, with a smile, that Veronica was not far off. Miss Stuart was gorgeously dressed in velvet and fur, and Georgie admitted at once that she looked her best.

Georgie stood up almost involuntarily, and Clint caught her eye and gave her a discreet smile. Then she sat down again. He knew now where she was. Soon he would come and find her, so she turned her face from the room and prayed that Milson or Mr. Finney would not run her to earth, as she watched the yellow leaves driven along the wintry paths outside. A few Michaelmas daisies still kept a brave show, but for the most part the garden was dark and rather desolate, under a heavy grey sky.

It occurred to her after a time that Clint was taking ages to get to her, and she began to drop slowly from the golden glories of her first mood. The crowd in the room was thinning as people took Miss White's advice and went to the dining-room for tea, and there was now no sign of Clint anywhere, nor of Veronica. Lady Duncarrig had left the room also, and Mr. Finney was terribly obvious as he sat and looked at a book in an isolated corner.

Should she stir, Georgie knew that she must fall into his hands, and a wretched feeling of pity towards him would make it impossible for her to shake him off. No one, not even Miss White, had asked him to go and have tea, and he was far too shy to proceed upon his own initiative.

Georgie felt suddenly as though she might cry. It was ridiculous to be left like this, and Clint knew perfectly well where to find her. Perhaps he was having to be polite to some one; but Georgie felt, deep in her heart, that such was not the case. He was not the man to sacrifice himself to duty. How could it be accounted for? She could not bear to think of being taken into the dining-room by Finney, and perhaps meeting Clint on his way to her. The situation demanded patience. It was stupid to put on your best clothes and go to a party, just to be hidden away in a window and not get so much as a sugared cake out of it all. She could not believe that Clint did not mean to come, so she set her teeth and waited.

At length Mr. Finney laid down his book, looked at the scattered groups who still remained in the drawing-room and with the air of a man whose choice is flight, went swiftly

through the drawing-room door. He knew it to be bad manners to leave a party without saying good-bye to your hostess, but he had got past caring.

It was a relief to see him leave, but it in no way altered the problem of Georgie's own conduct. To be exactly where you are expected to be is one of the surest ways of being found by some one who wants to find you; Georgie knew that, as she drifted into a sense of despair, and she began to experience a pang of ill-usage from her world. She forgot that if you deliberately hide behind a curtain, even the most faithful may conclude that you are not there at all, and the original density of the crowd had made recognition difficult. But Clint knew. Clint had smiled that queer, suppressed smile which at the moment had seemed to infer so much, and then he had left her alone.

Georgie had made up her mind to wait no longer, when a man whom she had never seen before came into the room. She was not prepossessed by his appearance, for he was not "dashing." He wore quiet and ordinary grey clothes, and his face was weather-beaten and hard. She missed the fact that he was remarkable, and that he had expressive eyes and a firm, clever mouth, and when he wandered to the window where she sat, he almost walked over her feet before he was aware that she existed. Having become aware of her, he apologised and looked away from her at once.

"They seem to have a nice garden," he said.

"Indeed, yes," Georgie replied. She was a little in awe of the new-comer, now that he stood there, and felt that he was not the sort of man she could talk to.

"Had tea?" he inquired.

"Indeed, no," Georgie admitted.

"Come on, then." He turned away. "It's hard fighting, but it can be done."

She followed him humbly through the room and into the hall, which was full of people.

It was just Georgie's luck that they should meet Lady Duncarrig, who immediately looked away as though she had been stung, but her new acquaintance did not appear to take any notice as he led on with awful directness towards a corner where Clint was standing by Veronica Stuart's chair. She was one of the few people who were seated, and there was a vacant chair beside her.

"There you are," the strange man said, and Georgie sat down helplessly. He had gone to get her tea, and Clint spoke awkwardly, while Miss Stuart turned a most deliberate back towards her.

"How do you do, Miss Desmond?"

Georgie turned and smiled. She was quick to forgive, and, after all, it probably was not his fault.

"How do I do, is it? Whisper, Captain Clint, whoever on earth is the gentleman who brought me here?"

"Lousada," Clint said, and Veronica got up and touched his arm.

"Time to move," she said, with a laugh which jarred Georgie's nerves hatefully. "Come."

Clint hesitated for a second and looked at Georgie, but he did not speak, neither did he seem to wish to. She watched him go, and somehow the whole thing hurt and humbled her. Lady Duncarrig had been almost rude to Dada when he wanted to speak a few simple words of politeness, and now Clint, who was her ideal of all that a man should be, was certainly anxious to escape from her. As for Miss Stuart, she had added what she could to the overpowering effect of social failure. Her eyes were full of her sorrows when Lousada came back to her, and as no one was sitting on the empty chair, he sat down and crossed his legs and looked before him.

"Don't you never drink tea?" she asked tremulously. He had terrifying manners, and she was half afraid to speak.

"No," he replied. "What happened to the people who were here?"

"Is it Clint and Miss Stuart? They cleared out—I suppose on account of myself"

Lousada turned and looked at her, and then he laughed with a most surpassing touch of pleasure.

"How extremely funny," he said. "How did you do it?"

"She doesn't like me."

"Oh? And Clint?"

Georgie blushed furiously, and her teaspoon clattered to the floor.

"He's fearfully good-looking," she replied.

"I suppose that's the right answer, though it doesn't seem to have anything to say to it," he said, recovering the teaspoon.

"It's so hard to understand things," Georgie remarked ab-

sently, and her face grew tragic. "Tell you the truth, I've been saying to myself that I'd better have stayed at home."

"Don't you like parties?" Lousada still appeared to be amused, and she felt irritated to think he regarded her as a joke. "Neither do I."

"We were asked because she had t'ask us."

"Who are 'we'?" he said, watching her.

"Dada and myself. He is the Rector of Ardclare, and we live in the Rectory at the top of the town."

"Ah, I see. But why did you come?"

Again Georgie flushed uncomfortably. "Oh, we had to," she said, and her eyes travelled to the door. Even yet Clint might return and make good, taking her away from this very alarming "friend" she had made for herself.

"You couldn't have *had* to," he objected. "You might have made an excuse."

"But Dada has to," she said vaguely. "It's part of being a clergyman."

"And you had to see him through. I see. Where is your father?"

"He and th' Archdeacon are somewhere," she replied. "You see, Dada doesn't notice. Now, I notice at once."

"Yes?" He looked away again.

"Lady Dun gave me an awful look just now," Georgie said anxiously.

"And was that why you hid in the window curtains?"

Again Georgie's colour flooded up to her forehead, and Mr. Lousada showed mercy.

"Look here," he said, "I'll give you some advice, a thing I very seldom do, and I don't expect you to take it. Never do *anything* you don't want to."

"Don't you?" she asked, awestruck at the idea.

"Certainly not." He smiled half to himself, and almost as he spoke Georgie caught sight of Clint returning to the dining-room without Veronica Stuart. Her heart beat with suffocating rapidity, and her eyes shone. It meant so much that he should come even at the eleventh hour and take away the dreadful feeling of having been neglected and passed by.

Lousada watched her again, and his eyes travelled on to Clint, who came with no uncertain step to where they sat, and then at once he got up and walked away, without saying another word to Georgie Desmond.

"Well, of all the strangers!" Georgie raised her eyes rapturously to Clint's face. "We'd nearly want to be introduced all over again."

"It's all right about the hotel," he said. "I've got rooms. Awful pokey little hole, but good enough. By the way, I found Mr. Desmond, who had got marooned in the library; he wants to go home."

"He'll not mind," Georgie said quickly. "Sit down, and we'll talk."

But Clint did not sit down; he only put a hand on the back of a chair.

"How did you get on with Lousada?" he asked.

"I don't know. He's queer, I think. Fearfully clever, I s'pose?"

"I don't like him," Clint replied carelessly, and Georgie felt that, as far as she was concerned, Mr. Lousada was down and under.

"For all that, I might have had no tea at all if it hadn't been for him." She looked a little reproachful. "He found me in the window. It wasn't such fun there, all alone, looking out at the garden."

"I couldn't help it." Clint spoke with some irritation. "It's not always possible to do just what one likes. Lady Duncarrig asked me to look after people."

"And it was Miss Stuart you chose?"

"Don't be a silly little goose, Georgie." He smiled at her and bent down confidentially. "If I could have got to you I would have. You know that."

She was not critical, and she really believed that she did know it.

"I'll forgive you this once," she replied. "Not that you deserve it, Eustace."

He stood up again and reviewed the room with an amused glance. People were still having tea, with the desperation of men and women who must be doing something.

"What a queer crowd," he said, and somehow his words touched her loyalty to her own, even though her own were in the habit of rending her in pieces.

"Are they very grand where you come from?" she asked, with a touch of hostility. "No laughing-stocks at all? I wonder, now."

"Of course they are different," he said casually. "To begin

with, they wear decent clothes." He had not meant to hurt her, and really he felt that she was attractive enough to dress in a sack, but the shot told.

"D'you suppose anyone dresses badly for choice?" she asked in a low voice, dropping her eyes suddenly. "In England every one's rich, I'm told, and so it's small thanks to them."

Clint looked down at her bent head, and the pathetic hat, some of the trimming of which was already coming to pieces, and was furious with himself. His stupid criticism had hurt her, and how was he to withdraw? But he had learnt the ways of a passable courtier long ago, and he knew he could do pretty well what he liked with Georgie.

"They need it all," he said, and he touched her arm with a quick, encouraging movement of his hand. "An Irish girl is admittedly the most perfect thing God ever made."

"You laugh at us," she answered, still keeping her head bent, "and look down on us, because we're different from you."

"So much the better. No one wants you to change."

Georgie rallied her spirits, and looked up again.

"Surely to goodness I know that," she said. "And now, what about Dada? I'd best be making ready to have another grasp of icicles from Lady Dun."

"When shall I see you?" he asked.

"When they clear out, I s'pose."

"Not for three days, Georgie? Three days is a long time."

She gave him a long look, which was duly noted by Mrs. Francis Dykes, who was having her third and final tea.

"Georgie intends to run her usual rig with that Captain Clint," she remarked to her neighbour. "The way that girl hunts men is something scandalous."

Mrs. Sharkey, a young woman who had married only and obviously for money, replied with a high scream of laughter. Sharkey had shown a strong liking for Georgie during the courting days, and she had never forgiven her.

"She's mad about men," she said, hardly troubling to lower her voice to discretion point. "If she gets Finney in the end, she'll be lucky."

They watched Georgie go out of the room with Clint, and fell to vigorously exhuming all her past misdeeds. In their eyes she was a reckless flirt, whose main attraction lay in the fact that she was "fast." If you were "fast" you could collect a following anywhere, and if you were not "fast" you might

easily be hard put to it to have enough partners for a dance programme. Lucy Carter joined them. She was well over thirty and had never been a subject of gossip, so that she could throw any quantity of stones. Certainly there seemed little hope of salvation for poor Georgie Desmond.

"She'll get left," Lucy Carter said with animation.

"And serve her right. It's the price of her," added Mrs. Francis Dykes, while Mrs. Sharkey repeated the assertion that Georgie was "mad about men."

Happily unconscious of what was being said of her, Georgie went into the hall and discovered Mr. Desmond sitting on a chair looking lonely and tired. Her conscience smote her, and she hurried up to him.

"Dada, I'm a wretch, amn't I? To go leave you like this. Come along home, now."

"Where have you been, Georgie?" he asked. "I have not seen you at all. You ought not to go away. People remark upon it."

"I was in a window for a bit, and then a gentleman asked me to come to tea," she said. "But Captain Clint——"

Mr. Desmond got up, and interrupted her at once, and Georgie turned to see that Clint had gone. She wished he had not, and that he had remained until the ordeal of once again being ignored by Lady Dun was over, but there was no getting out of it, and Lord Duncarrig caught sight of them as he was stifling a yawn at the drawing-room door.

"We've come to say good-bye to Lady Duncarrig," Georgie said, and he looked around the vast room.

"She doesn't seem to be here," he replied. "Never mind; I will tell her. I hope you had a good time?"

Georgie smiled and felt tremendously relieved. "Oh, the grandest!" she said enthusiastically.

"And you, Rector? I hope you were well looked after?"

"Thank you, I was. It was all very pleasant," Mr. Desmond said dolefully. "A delightful gathering, Lord Duncarrig. We are all very grateful for your hospitality."

"If some of them would only go," Lord Duncarrig thought, "all the rest might follow." He helped Mr. Desmond into his coat, and the archdeacon began from afar to collect his wife and large family, as a sense of coming departure made itself felt through the crowd of guests.

"Are you driving? No?" Lord Duncarrig asked as they stood

at the door. "It's a nice windy evening. No rain, I hope. No?" He smiled again at Georgie, and felt he would have liked to give her a paternal kiss, only what would Alicia have said? "Georgie is a great favourite of mine, Mr. Desmond," he said, as he walked on to the steps in the high, tearing wind and the soft darkness. "I suppose we shall all dance at her wedding one day soon. Dear me, I remember her as a tiny thing."

But Mr. Desmond made no reply; he only thanked Lord Duncarrig again for his kindness, and Georgie tucked her arm into his and led him away.

"Several people asked where you were. Finney was looking for you," Mr. Desmond said, and he coughed a hard, hacking cough.

"I'm awfully sorry, Dada, but I was in the window."

"With that Captain Clint?"

"No, Dada. All by myself."

Mr. Desmond had just been going to cough again, but restrained himself.

CHAPTER VI

THE Duncarrigs left for London, and Ardclare felt their departure, in the sense that the rivalries their presence promoted had to cease, and Miss White was free to romance to her heart's content on the subject of what had been. Her one invitation to dinner was multiplied several times, and she said that she was dreadfully lonely since dear Lady Duncarrig had gone, and hardly knew what to do with herself.

No one really missed them at all, but certainly no one was so glad of their departure as Georgie Desmond, for Clint was a free man, and there had been a great deal of satisfaction in the surprise it occasioned to Mrs. Francis Dykes, when the news spread, that he was established at the hotel. He was after Georgie Desmond, of course, but that made nothing really secure. He hadn't any idea of marrying her, and it was merely the result of her "fast" ways. So the county talked, and Miss White, ever a faithful friend, fought battle after battle on behalf of Georgie, whom she always regarded as a kind of spiritual stepdaughter. It was very grievous to her to think that Georgie was travelling along the road to spinsterhood, while both Mr. Finney and Milson Rogers might either of them provide her with a home, but she was a born romanticist, and she sometimes wondered if Captain Clint, whom she admired so much, might not really be falling in love with Georgie.

It was known that he was rich, and that he had a place in England, and that he could certainly afford a wife; but when she spoke of this, Mrs. Sharkey laughed her to scorn. The idea of Georgie marrying a man who was richer than her own husband, to say nothing of his appearance and social status, was simply intolerable to her.

Garryowen had recovered, and Georgie was hunting again, so that she frequently came late for choir practices, in a muddled and ecstatic condition, which raised a storm of wrath in the hearts of the choristers, and reduced poor Mr. Finney to despair.

Still, Mr. Finney was aware of an ally. Mr. Desmond re-

mained friendly, and his invitations to supper did not fall away. Georgie was always the same when he did see her, and never put on any airs, though Mr. Finney believed, and was almost alone in his faith, that Clint was waiting his opportunity to marry her and take her away for ever from Ardclare and a little house which had seemed so suitable for a young couple.

He had seen them riding back from a day's hunting, talking and laughing together, and his own courage faltered, but the knowledge that the unspoken approval of Georgie's father backed him made him cling steadily to his dream. He did not hear the general talk, because he was rather on the outer fringe of Ardclare society, and only the more democratic took any notice of him; but he had a lover's eye, and he knew that Clint was a rival.

As for Georgie, she was indifferent to talk or warnings. Clint had fastened on her imagination, and become the Prince Charming of her fairy story. He made love to her whenever opportunity offered, and she drifted. Even Milson Rogers did not try any longer to accompany them home along the wonderful, mysterious roads after dark. She grew sentimental, and when Mr. Finney sang to her, or she sang to him, she felt a mist before her eyes. Clint was the sum total of her whole heart's store, and she looked out at strange faces over the rainbow ring which encircled her.

Only Dada held his former power; and in a way it was augmented by her emotion for Clint. Dada was unhappy, and her happiness made him so. He coughed a great deal, and when she came in late to the choir practices, or Clint was found sitting with her in the drawing-room, he said nothing, but the lines in his face grew deeper than before, and she knew that it was all her fault.

He approved of Finney, and continually invited him to the rectory. Finney's habit of saying "Ta" was no longer a pleasing eccentricity which amused her, because, one dreadful day, he and Clint met in the drawing-room, and when Mr. Finney had gone Clint positively stormed at her. *Why* could she not see what an intolerable outsider the wretched young man was? He had lost his temper badly, and told her never to allude to "gentlemen" or "ladies"; that in civilised circles these words were obsolete, and were only now used by people who themselves were neither. Georgie knew in a flash that, sometimes, she too must appear nearly as awful as Mr. Finney in the eyes of

Eustace Clint. She had been miserable for days, but though she felt it to be unfair of Clint and rather mean in herself, she could not again regard Mr. Finney without criticism. All this made the existing difficulties between her and her father more intense.

Mr. Desmond never said openly that he did not wish Clint to come so frequently to the house, nor did he directly inform Georgie that he wanted her to marry Finney; he only became more and more sad, and asked at intervals how much longer "this sort of thing" was to go on.

"Is it Eustace coming here?" she asked one wild evening, as the old windows rattled in the storm and the trees outside groaned and creaked under the lash of the wind.

"I've done my best for you," Mr. Desmond said evasively. "You are a great care, Georgie."

"Dada!" She spoke pleadingly, and dropped the stocking she was darning. "You aren't out with me over Eustace?"

"Don't talk nonsense," he said angrily; "but there ought to be some reason in all things." And then he took his prayer-book from his pocket and began to read a psalm, which, as it was earlier than usual, and not really time for evening prayers, showed that he did not wish to continue the conversation.

Georgie sat on the side of her little bed and pondered over the question. Dada was so fond of her, she argued, that he naturally wished to see her happy, and there was every reason why he should be dissatisfied. Clint made love to her; often his love-making was very fervent, so fervent that it frightened her and she retreated before it, but as yet he had never said a single word about marrying her. She hoped and even prayed that he would. It all meant so much, and to see him go, as he would go, unless he took her with him, would break her heart. And who would care?

Once or twice Clint had almost uttered the wonderful words, and then, somehow, he seemed to fight them back. She lay across her bed, her chin on her hands, thinking. If she chose to give Finney so much as a look, he would be at her feet. Finney, who had never dared to attempt to kiss her. Was that how things always went? Dada wanted her to marry Finney, and yet he could not really like such a pale, spotty-faced young man; and life in a small house, on small means, in Ardclare did not offer exactly a bouquet of roses. Dada felt that Mr. Finney was good; that explained it. If you were a clergyman the thing

you must look for was goodness in your future son-in-law, and Clint was not good. Georgie knew that very well indeed.

In the end she began to go over the pleasant episodes of the day, for Georgie never dwelt long on the troubled side of life, and she drifted off to sleep, when she had put out her candle by the simple process of wetting her fingers and pinching the wick, and dreamed that she and Clint, and Dada, were all sitting in a hayfield under a blue sky, and that there was a heavenly sense of peace everywhere, until Lousada looked round the haycock and repeated his remark: "Never do anything you do not really want to do."

Yet, in spite of all the doubts which assailed her, Georgie was very happy, and as Christmas grew nearer, Clint was reluctantly dragged to the more frequent practices in the church, and Christmas Eve brought, in its coming, the usual decorations, which always meant a social gathering. Georgie gave them tea at the rectory, and the church was full of busy people, constructing wreaths and battling with huge boughs of holly.

It was a cold little edifice, standing on the top of the hill, facing the dark mountain range. Inside, the building was typical of the worst phase of the Victorian period. The walls were coloured with pale-green distemper, and the seats square, cushioned with faded red rep. The general flavour of the place was middle-aged rather than old. Its memories were not remote, for Ardclare Church had a modern past, and its ghosts were the ghosts of everybody's youth.

But though it might be gloomy at other times, it was anything but desolate on Christmas Eve. Miss White decorated the font, turning it into the semblance of a holly bush, and was decently separated from her enemy, Mrs. Francis Dykes, who adorned the east window and was accused of grabbing the best things from the Ardclare conservatories to this end. There was a constant flow of chatter going on, and Milson Rogers made one of the party, though Georgie accused him of doing little else but steal grapes from the back of the opulent black bunches, which were there by order of Lady Duncarrig.

Clint was hunting with a distant pack, and would only return just in time—if that—for the choir practice, and Georgie flung her restless energy into the work of making wreaths, and swathing the pulpit in red flannel bandages flecked with cotton wool.

"Lady Duncarrig specially wishes me to have the two pots of arums," Miss White said from her place near the door, as Mrs. Francis Dykes was seen issuing orders that the coveted pots should be put at her end of the church; and then a bitter wrangle ensued, which only ended when the sexton nudged Miss White respectfully in the ribs, and remarked under his breath that she might leave it to him, and that he would see to it when Mrs. Dykes had gone home.

How queer it all was, Georgie thought. She remembered so many Christmas decorations, mingled with the smell of branches of firs and the poignant sweetness of chrysanthemums. She always decorated the lectern, and she wondered for how many more years she would continue to go on doing the same things. She knew Dada's Christmas sermon by heart, and could have preached it herself, if necessary, and she thought it very touching and sweet. As her hands worked mechanically, she thought with a cold little sting of misery, that after New Year, Clint would go away. Would he really go without having said anything definite?

"I've asked you twice for the scissors," Milson Rogers said, in his loud voice. "Are you in love, Georgie? Or don't you wash your ears?"

Georgie turned and laughed at him. "I was wondering what I'd get in the morning," she said. "I love presents, Milson."

He thought of the neat little cutting whip he had bought for her, and his eyes softened slightly. Georgie was enough to vex a saint, but, somehow—somehow, one always forgave her.

"You'll get nothing from me," he remarked. "Here, get up out of that, and I'll fix the wreath."

"I have a grand cake inside," Georgie said. "Made it myself. There's a red rag and a blue rag, though as we don't never meet sailors, that's not much good."

"I have a cousin who is a Commander," Lucy Carter spoke with some pride.

"Glory! Then that'll be for you," Georgie continued. "And a ring, Milson, and a thimble for th'old maid, and thruppence for the bachelor, which should be yourself."

"There's heaps of girls would grab me," Milson replied, "only I haven't asked them yet."

"Waiting for them to ask you?" she retorted. "Well, I'll not, for one."

"You might get the crooked stick, yet, Georgie," Mrs. Dykes interposed, standing back to admire the east window.

"Meaning Milson?" Georgie replied with a stifled giggle.

"I think its very bad manners to be laughing in church," Miss White said solemnly. "I was always brought up to show respect. But nowadays, young people never show respect."

The church lamps were lighted, and at last the party crossed the road and invaded the rectory for tea, where Mr. Desmond received them and tried to make himself into a buffer between Mrs. Francis Dykes and Miss White, who showed unusual signs of fight, and the sugared cake was cut amid a terrific amount of noise, which was augmented by the fact that Milson nearly swallowed the thimble.

"Holy pokers! What have I?" he said. "'Tis the thimble! I'll give it a clean up and it will do for me grandmother."

Tea, in spite of the noise and laughter, seemed to Georgie to be interminable, and her roving eyes turned again and again to the clock. She began to fear that something had happened to Clint, and the thought was agony. Perhaps he was lying on a stretcher with a broken leg, perhaps he had broken his neck and was no longer in the same warm world with her. She felt an inward trembling, so fearful and ominous that she could not speak, and made some excuse to leave her guests and stand listening at the door. But still he did not come and she had to go back into the room where every one was laughing, and even Dada was making quite a lot of noise.

Time is unchanging, in spite of our humours, and after a little, it was impossible to postpone the hour for the practice. Mr. Desmond grew fussy. He knew the acrid temper of his parishioners, and that the handful of children already waiting in the cold church would return with complaints against him. They knew what was due to them as Protestant children, and he hurried the party off, scolding Georgie at the door as they departed.

The night outside the Rectory was intensely dark, and the sky curtained with heavy clouds. Directly the front door closed, people became invisible to one another, so that Mrs. Dykes and Miss White kept together in unwonted accord.

Beyond, the church windows made a brave show, illuminated against the dark, and as Georgie walked up the shallow steps she was struck by a sense of something beautiful. Only the lamps in the chancel had been lighted, and the rest of the in-

terior was sombre and mysterious. Here was the full sense of real Christmas, peace on earth.

Mr. Finney was already there waiting with the rest, and very conscious of a box in his pocket containing two bottles of scent and a cake of soap, which he was going to present to Georgie; and with a buzz of lowered voices, the choir took out their copies of the anthem and prepared to sing.

Would Clint never come, and was he dead? If he were, how was Georgie to go on as if nothing had happened? A memory of his passionate kisses came to her, and she struck a discord in a loud, unforgiving moan of sound.

"We'll begin with a hymn," she said, turning on the seat and looking at Mr. Finney's back. "It'll get us into voice. First and last verses of 'Brightest and Best.'"

The choir responded vigorously, and Mrs. Dykes caused a distraction by singing the second verse while the others sang the last, so that the children were overcome with mirth and could not sing at all.

When it was over Georgie looked down the dark aisle again, and the miserable feeling that everything was wrong submerged her.

"The anthem," she said, without turning.

"For unto us a child is born," sang the bass, very lugubriously, as though they were anything but glad. "For unto us a Son is given," shrilled the trebles in a shriek of coy astonishment, and then they joined in a contest, the trebles gaining perceptibly as the race continued.

Georgie raised her hands from the notes. "Trebles two beats out, and some one is dragging"; and so it began again.

"And His Name shall be call-ed Wonderful," boomed the head constable in an agitated solo.

"Counsellar," Mr. Finney responded in a throaty tenor, "the Everlasting Fawther . . ."

Georgie had lifted her hands again, and Mr. Finney forged ahead for a moment, and came to a blushing and discomforted conclusion as Clint, in a mud-stained red coat and a crumpled stock made his way towards the choir.

Georgie felt as though, from having sat in a vault, she had been taken and plunged into a ret hot sea, and she lost her head for a moment, as she watched him come, looking so beautiful in her eyes; and all the choir watched with her.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said, without any real conviction of sin in his easy, resounding voice. "Am I too late?"

"Better late than never," Georgie replied, her hands shaking and deprived of power. "Get out your copy, Captain Clint, and fit yourself in somewhere." She felt she must get time in which to grow calm again, or she would make the organ scream so wildly that even Mrs. Francis Dykes would realise that something was wrong with it.

He took his place close beside her, so that she was tremendously aware of him, and there was a shuffling of feet and whispered remarks.

"We have to get home to-night," Milson said in a stormy voice. "Get a move on yourself, Georgie."

"For unto us," she said, and her voice was stifled and had a quaver in it.

At last it was over, and the choir slipped away, wishing each other a happy Christmas; poor Mr. Finney waiting desperately, the box clutched in perspiring hands.

"A little memento," he said, as he was the last left in the chancel, except for Clint, who was evidently going to see Georgie home.

"Is it a present? How lovely," Georgie took it from him. "Will I guess what's in it, or shall I wait? I don't know if I can wait till to-morrow to open it." But Mr. Finney had already departed. "And I haven't as much as a card for him," she said regretfully. "I might get one in the morning that would do for him. *Isn't* he good?"

"I expect so," Clint said drily. "Why do you encourage him?"

"I? What?"

"Encourage him. You always do. You were ridiculous just now, and of course he thinks you are pleased."

"Well, so I am. Wouldn't you be pleased if any person was as kind as all that?"

"It's absolutely wrong," he said, and his face looked sullen. "Making a fuss over some wretched little box of rubbish. It's outrageous that the fellow thought he might give you a present."

Georgie's eyes grew round, and she remembered the many presents she had received, including the gold wristwatch she wore, which Simon had given her exactly a year ago.

"I don't mind your being glad to make him happy, if that was all," Eustace continued. "But I believe you really are excited, yourself, about it."

"Well, I'm not now," she said sorrowfully. "I don't want it any more."

At that he relented, and he helped her on with her coat.

"I am fearfully jealous," he said, catching her elbows. "You drive me mad, Georgie, and often, I wish I had never seen you."

"Is that to please me?" she looked at him. "The sexton is watching us, he's fearfully particular, Eustace, and we mustn't wait idling here. You are coming to dinner to-morrow night. Don't forget that."

"I shall not," he spoke again with the same intensity. "I ordered a tiny little thing for you myself. It ought to reach you in the morning. With my love, Georgie."

They were on the path outside the church, and the dark clouds had broken, showing great drifts of stars overhead.

"All of it, or only a bit?" she asked.

"All of it."

He caught her in his arms and kissed her on the mouth. She had knitted him a silk tie, which had cost her all her yearly present from an old cousin, for pocket-money she had none, and Dada was not easy to approach for current expenses. Clint would find it on his hot water can in the morning; she had left it, with instructions, at the hotel.

"Will you miss me?" he asked as they walked on.

"I will," she replied, and again a surge of misery overtook her.

"Not half as much as I shall miss you. But we won't talk about that yet."

"You aren't going until New Year?" she said urgently.

"The first of January," he answered. "I've had to fix that date for certain."

Georgie said nothing. There was no use going forth to meet one's troubles, for troubles had a way of coming along of themselves at a steady, inevitable pace. There were still five days of joy, and five days which must not be marred by the shadow of fate. But she knew now that Clint did not mean anything.

She came in late for supper, but Mr. Desmond did not notice it, and she laid Finney's gift on the table. There were a number of other presents waiting for her, and she opened them without enthusiasm, though she displayed them to Dada with appropriate exclamations.

Attached to the cutting whip there was a card which depicted

a flushed lady in a tight blue habit riding a carthorse over an impossible six-barred gate, and underneath, the words "The Pride of the Hunt." Milson must have taken a lot of trouble to get such a lovely picture, and she laid it aside with a sigh, nor did she take the stoppers out of the bottles of "Chypre" and "Jessamine," which represented, she knew, wild extravagance on the part of Mr. Finney.

"Very nice, very nice," Mr. Desmond said, handling the bottles absently. "Did the practice go well?" he inquired.

"It went off fine," Georgie said, her eyes on the litter of paper and string. Clint's present was still to come, but she was dull and not full of her usual anticipation of joy.

CHAPTER VII

THE Christmas dinner was less of a failure than it might have been, and Georgie wore the pearl pendant that arrived in a case, duly registered, from a London jeweller's. Georgie had the courage of a true gambler, and was able to fend off future ills, contriving to "cut the rope which was nearest the throat"; and, as she sat at the head of the untidy-looking dinner-table, while Dada carved the turkey, she was happy. Nor did she allow Mr. Finney to feel out of it, though he was uncomfortably aware that his blue serge was contrasting desperately badly with Clint's expensive-looking evening clothes.

Yes, it had gone off well, and the Stephen's Day meet had been another joyful occasion when Georgie had really distinguished herself in a run over an exceptionally stiff line of country. The last days had been the best and sweetest of many good days, and it was only on the thirty-first of December that she suddenly plunged deep in a slough of despond. Reality caught her violently, and she awoke to tears which had to be smothered and held back.

Clint was to spend his last evening at the Rectory, and providence, working through remote contingencies, arranged that they should be alone, because Miss White's disreputable brother lay dying, and was very uneasy as to his future state. Miss White arrived at the Rectory and fetched Mr. Desmond just after supper was finished, sweeping him off tragically to do what he could to support her brother in his last hours.

"He is very repentant," she said tearfully, "now that he knows that recovery is out of the question."

"We must all die," Mr. Desmond said, his usual gloom intensified. "And, indeed, it may be regarded as a blessed release for some of us." He looked at Georgie, who stood pale and alarmed by the open door. "If it were not for Georgie, I should be glad to go and meet my Maker to-night, in your brother's place."

Two tears coursed down Georgie's cheeks. It was so hard on Dada that he could not even die comfortably, because of her; and she stood in the bleak night watching the bobbing light

of Miss White's lantern, wondering if death was as awful as it sounded, and why, when it was the common lot, no one seemed to believe in it until the very last moment. When Clint left, she would wish herself dead with real conviction. Even now she thought she would be divinely happy if she knew that she was to fall into that strange gulf, when their lips met for the last time.

It never occurred to her to think that he was treating her badly, and that, for his fleeting pleasure, he had made her "the talk of the world." She was entirely uncritical, and her love blinded her to all facts other than her glorified ideal of an ordinary, and well-turned-out young man.

He came upon her as she waited, chilled and weary, at the open door, and stood watching her silently. "I'm feeling pretty wretched," he said, gripping her hand.

"Same here," she replied with a watery smile as he followed her into the house. "'Twill be all one, in a hundred years, I s'pose."

"Georgie, I've never done you any harm," he said earnestly, and she did not remind him that if he had not, it was only because she drew a very decided line between what was lawful and what was not, in her eyes. "At least I have never been cad enough to give you cause to hate me, later on."

"I'd never hate you," she said, fighting back her tears desperately. "We've had a good old time, and now it's over."

"I'll come back next winter," he replied. "We can look forward to that, darling."

Georgie made a pretence of belief. One had to pretend just to cover up the nakedness of stark facts.

"I've never met anyone like you." He kissed her again and again. "Most girls would think . . ." he stumbled over the words. "I mean it's so hard on you."

"The best of friends must part," she said. "Why would I make it any worse, Eustace?"

"You won't forget me, and you'll wear that little pendant?"

"Always." A sob caught her tired voice.

The clock was ticking the time away relentlessly, and she prayed that Miss White's brother would take pattern by King Charles the Second, and be an unconscionable time in dying.

Words failed Clint, and he held her silently in his arms. He was unusually quiet and silent, and it was as though his own heaviness held him from speech. Once, he had thought the little room ugly and over-crowded, and that Georgie's surroundings

were hopelessly crude. They had offended his eye, and he laughed at them, and now they had become familiar and even dear. They sat on an old broken-down sofa, covered with dingy chintz, and the lamp in a brass stand smelt villainously. He was never going to sit there again, and yet she had not uttered one murmur of reproach. Old scenes came back to him. He had not kept out of marriage without making a fight, and there were others who had suffered at his hands in a way which Georgie had not . . . He kissed her again. "You won't marry that awful fellow Finney?" he said. "I should hate it, if I hear you have."

"Finney? Is it poor Finney?"

"Yes, promise me you'll never marry him."

"I'd never do it from choice."

"But you *can't* mean that you'd let your father force you into it. It would be infamous if he did."

"Dada'd not force me. He's awfully gentle," she said pitifully. "It's natural that he's worried about me."

Clint glared furiously in front of him over Georgie's bent head. He had no illusions about Mr. Desmond whatever, and regarded him as a monster in clerical garb.

"He knows how to work on your feelings," he said passionately. "Don't let him, sweetheart; it's damnably unfair."

"You don't know a thing about Dada," she said in a muffled voice, "and you're angry because he didn't ever like you, Eustace."

"And he *likes* Finney? My dear child, if your father thought I was . . ." again he stopped, it was too blunt a thing to say to her.

"He knows that he is very good," she said, "and he thinks you aren't a saint. He's quite right there, you can give that away to him, Eustace, and don't be vexed about it."

"If he imagined I had a wedding ring in my pocket, he wouldn't care whether I was a saint or not," were the words which rose to Clint's lips, but he did not speak them. She believed in Mr. Desmond, and, after all, it had nothing to do with him. He was leaving Ardclare in the morning, and never intended to return. Logically he should have had no grievance, but for all that, the grievance was there.

"Dada's a good judge of character," she went on with an attempt at a laugh.

"Do you know that it's time I went away?" he said, and

he kissed her eyes, the salt taste of tears on his lips. "Georgie, Georgie, I swear I never guessed it was going to be so hard for us both."

She said nothing, but clung to him helplessly, and he held her in his arms as they stood on the shabby old hearthrug.

"Don't be worrying," she spoke in a low voice. "When people have to live through things, they get through all right." Once again he held her close and kissed her white little face and closed eyes.

"You do love me, Georgie?" He simply could not let her off or make it any easier for her.

"With my heart—oh, my dearest love," she sobbed, breaking under his appeal. "Surely, I do."

And then Mr. Desmond's latchkey sounded its clicking sound in the lock of the front door, and they drew apart.

Clint recovered himself quickly, out of long practice, but Georgie was white and her hair looked wild, as her father opened the door and came in. He gave a hasty glance at them both, and then greeted Clint with averted eyes.

"I came round to say good-bye, sir," Clint said in his usual tones. "I'm off by the early train."

"Ah, is that so? Well, I will not detain you."

"How is Mr. White?" Georgie asked; she had been bending over the fire, and she still attended to it.

"He has gone to give an account of the deeds done in the body," Mr. Desmond said in a dry, harsh voice.

"Poor Miss White," Georgie found a crumpled little wisp of a pocket handkerchief. "It's fearfully sad."

"It is a very solemn and awful thought," her father replied, and Clint held out his hand awkwardly.

"I must thank you for your kindness while I was here," he said, taking Mr. Desmond's cold fingers.

"Say good-bye to Captain Clint, Georgie, and I will see him to the door," Mr. Desmond said, turning to his daughter, and Georgie held out her hand, forcing herself to smile.

"Good luck," she said, "and good times to you. Don't be sea-sick crossing the Channel."

Clint took her hand but he could think of nothing to say, for though Mr. Desmond stood at the door with his back to them, he felt that he was being watched.

"Good-bye," he said lamely, and he walked from the room.

A moment later, Georgie heard the front door bang, and

Mr. Desmond rattled a heavy chain. It was as though he had shut out hope and love and happiness, and yet it was certainly not Dada's fault.

She turned out the lamp, and kissing her father, who did not speak to her, went quietly up to bed.

That Georgie had swollen eyes, and a splitting headache, in addition to a sense of acute anguish in her heart, did not alter the fact that she had to go about things as usual on the following day.

Life has to be gone on with, even if one envied such as Mr. White, who had got done with it for good; and by early dinner-time Mr. Desmond was forced into speech. He did not admit that he noticed anything, but he harangued Georgie upon the rashness and folly of her acts. She had no sense whatever, and she filled his life with anxiety and distress. No girl with any sense of proper pride would allow the attentions of undesirable admirers. But before he had concluded, Milson Rogers arrived with a message from Miss White, who wanted Mr. Desmond at once.

The cook was showing an undue amount of grief at her brother's death, and Miss White had to lock her out of the room where he lay. As she was the one person who really sorrowed for Mr. White, Georgie thought it was unexpectedly cruel of his sister, but then it was considered shocking, and she was not supposed to know anything about it; so she did not venture to speak.

Milson gave her one very straight look, and grew angry at once, sniffing contemptuously.

"When will you give over that kind of donkey polo, Georgie? Turning decent men against you's what you're doing," he said, as Mr. Desmond went to put on his coat.

Georgie looked at the dirty plates and the crumbs on the table before her.

"I can take care of myself," she said. "Don't scold me, Milson."

"And a nice record he has," Milson went on savagely. "I heard a few things about him from a fella' in the cavalry, who was after Fanny-Clara, and came to try her last Wednesday. He said that Clint had once been in a divorce case, and let down the woman concerned, badly."

Georgie got up, her cheeks flaming. "I'll not hear him spoken of like that," she said. "I won't listen." She put her hands

over her ears. "He and I are friends, and you can talk to some one else; there's plenty in Ardclare will welcome you."

"What's all this?" Mr. Desmond said, appearing at the door, muffled to the chin and ready for the drive.

"Georgie and me having a bit of an argument," Milson said, giving her a significant glance. He did not intend to hand on his information to her father, as he very well knew that she was in for a bad enough time without that, but he would have liked to have shaken her. "Well, we must shorten the road," he pulled on his gloves. "I have tickets for a *matinée* at the theatre on Saturday; will you come, Georgie?"

But she did not run after her father and kiss him, as was her wont. She only stood at the table and looked at the plates and the crumbs through her tears, for Milson's shot had told, and she was feeling it hideously.

All the dull, cold day she kept indoors. If she went out and met people they would certainly speak of Clint and remark upon the fact that he was gone, watching to see how she was taking it. She felt, too, that they were all glad to think that they had been true prophets, but her most real concern was with Clint himself. She knew that he was, as she had said, no saint, but the idea of his having been openly dishonourable, if it were really the case, hurt her desperately. There was a strong streak of the Puritan in Georgie's nature which arose now and then and asserted itself. If Clint had really once acted dishonourably, she felt that she had lessened and lowered herself in some vague way by her own capitulation to him.

And so the weary day dragged through, and Georgie sat desolately by the dining-room fire. There was no need to waste coal by lighting one in the drawing-room, and also she realised that she must make a fight against her tremendous memories. She was cold, lonely and beaten, and though she kissed the little pearl pendant, it did not make anything better. Dada would be back for tea, having settled matters with the cook who cried too much. Georgie wondered how he would settle it. Miss White invariably consulted Mr. Desmond upon every event of her life, and seemed to regard him as an oracle.

At a little after five, when the outside world was sinking into twilight, Georgie heard the front door open, but she did not stir. Tea had been laid on the end of the dining-room table, and was ready, and presently Kate would bring the lamp, and

the interminable evening begin; so she sat listlessly where she was.

A sound from the hall made her start and flush. Dada was talking to some one, talking quite loudly and cordially, and the voice which replied to his was that of Clint.

She thought for a moment that she must be mad and the trouble of the morning had gone to her head, as she pressed her hands over her heart.

"She is not in here," Mr. Desmond said, having opened the drawing-room door. "No doubt she has gone out. Never mind, Captain Clint, we shall find her, we shall find her."

Was she dreaming? She stood, holding on to the mantel-piece, her whole body trembling like an aspen in a storm, and then the dining-room door was opened, and Dada came in. Such a changed Dada, with a smile on his face, and the air of a successful pioneer.

"Georgie, my dear, Captain Clint has returned," he said. He wishes to speak to you." And with that Mr. Desmond retreated and closed the door behind him.

What happened then Georgie hardly knew. She felt as though she had been whirled into a wonderful dreamland as Clint caught her up, lifting her from her feet.

"Georgie, I tried to go away. I got as far as Mallow, and when I saw the mail train coming in, I told the porter to cart my luggage across again, and I just took a ticket back to Ardclare." He kissed her and put her on her feet again, holding her shoulders with tense hands. "I met your father outside the gate and told him then and there that I had come back to ask you if you'd marry me."

"That was why Dada was so pleased," she said.

"And aren't you pleased? You want me, Georgie?"

She melted into his arms again, and all the old joy came racing back wildly to her heart.

"I love you," she said. "You know that, Eustace."

Yet somehow Georgie was not as happy as she should have been. She had actually gained her heart's desire, and Dada was entirely satisfied. She had scored more than she knew herself off the gossips of Ardclare, and life was opening its gates for her at last, so that she might pass through into the world's fair and enjoy herself. She was to have a good social position and plenty

of money, for Clint proposed to be generous indeed in the matter of settlements, and the outlook was as happy as it well could be, so that Miss White cheered up and looked into Georgie's mouth for traces of the golden spoon.

Eustace was ardent, and his haste to get the wedding over was, Mrs. Sharkey felt, hardly decent. He hustled Mr. Desmond and hurried things on at top speed, and even the most critical could not accuse him of lack of fervour.

"Tell me," Georgie said after an exhausting day in Cork, which she had spent in ordering more clothes than she had heretofore owned during the whole of her life, "did you ever do anything reely wicked, Eustace?"

They were having tea at the County Club, and he sat admiring her in a new hat, which was very becoming.

"Heaps of things," he agreed. "By the way, Georgie, don't worry too much about clothes. You can get a whole new rig-out in Paris, when we go there."

She was really going to "Pars," incredible as it seemed, and yet she was not smiling, because it had suddenly come over her that she must know the truth of Milson's story. "I'm in dead earnest," she said, leaning forward anxiously. "Were you ever in a divorce case?"

Clint flushed and sat stiffly in his chair. "Who's been telling you about that?" he asked.

"I heard it. It's *not* true?"

"It is all stale now, anyhow," he said, frowning. "I got let in."

Georgie became silent for a time and then spoke. "Oughtn't you have married her?" she asked.

"Oh, no. Not that sort of woman."

She flushed and still did not look up. "But if it was you as did the wrong, I don't see how——"

"Don't be a little idiot," he said shortly. "You don't understand these things. Anyhow," he rallied her, "if I *had*, I shouldn't be where I am now."

"Is she—did she marry since?"

"I've not heard," he said carelessly. "Did I tell you I'd got a letter from my sister to-day? You and she will like each other."

"Show," Georgie said, looking up and holding out her hand, but Eustace shook his head.

"She writes an infernal fist," he replied evasively. "It takes a lifetime to read her scrawls, and we have a train to catch."

Georgie did not speak again of the question she had put to him, and the uneasiness in her heart was by no means set at rest.

CHAPTER VIII

PRESENTS flowed in from all sides upon Georgie, who had always loved gifts, and her joy in receiving made the givers feel blessed, and the countenances of the people of Ardclare grew benevolent, now that she might so soon look down upon them all.

She received a short and extremely formal note from Clint's mother, and a letter from his sister which she was unable to read, but it looked as though it was kindly expressed, and Georgie thought she would like her when they met.

Clint had rushed over to England to make some arrangements, and was to return on the eve of the wedding with his best man, Lord Comerforth, a prospect the grandeur of which caused nearly a panic in the heart of Georgie and rendered Mrs. Sharkey speechless with rage. So for the last few days Georgie was given a little time to think over things, though not much, for there were still appointments with dressmakers, and while people trooped in to see her and sat for hours talking, there were all the arrangements for the wedding to be attended to in detail.

In these days Georgie clung to the fast-receding life with a kind of fury. She was happy. Over and over again she told herself so, and it was such a relief to see Dada with a smile on his face and to think that he felt he had done his very best for her, and that it had culminated in such a wonderful marriage for his beloved daughter. He took an interest in the wedding presents, and was pleased with Lady Duncarrig's icily-expressed congratulations which accompanied a silver flower-pot.

Milson Rogers took the blow well. He came to Georgie directly he heard of her engagement, and apologised for repeating idle gossip, wrung her hand violently so that her fingers ached, and said that he wished her joy.

"I always said you were a jewel. And the fellow that's got you is a lucky man. Wish you well, Georgie."

Miss White cried over her, and swore solemnly to take care of her "fawther," though she could not imagine Ardclare without

Georgie Desmond. Mrs. Francis Dykes was expansively gushing, and the people in the shops were interested and triumphant. They were all sorry that Clint was not a lord, but even so they considered him a very handsome man indeed, and had watched the affair from the start with keen attention. Georgie was the heroine of the piece, the princess of the fairy tale, and she was going to "Pars" for her honeymoon.

Kate Love lessened her hostility to the outside world, and was less abusive to messengers than of old, and the local tailor was busy making Mr. Desmond a new suit, the first he had been known to have for years. Georgie's position as organist had been passed on to Mrs. Dykes, who spent a few hours every day practising the Wedding March, for she and Miss White made an armistice on the head of decorations, and were to unite their forces to beautify the little church for the occasion. Wedding refreshments of a light kind were coming from Cork, and every day added speed to the whirl in which they all lived. Even the weather was kind, and the closing week of January was as warm and balmy as early spring.

Georgie had got back from Cork by an early train, and as she reached the Rectory she met Mr. Finney, whom she had not seen for some time, turning away from the house. He looked washed out and disconsolate, and Georgie felt a sudden spasm of pity towards the young man, so that she pressed him to come back with her and have tea.

"I'm dying of thirst as it is," she said, smiling at him with her bright, alluring eyes. "Don't *you* never get married, Mr. Finney; it's an awful show."

He followed her humbly into the house. Her engagement had come as no surprise to him, and he submitted silently to the justice of fate. She was born to the purple, and far too distant from his dreams for him to feel rancour or personal injury. Had she told him she was going to marry the Prince of Wales he would have considered it only suitable, for Mr. Finney's love was the love of the idealist.

He watched her as she took off her furs, and envied Clint because he could afford to give her such expensive things, and when she had poured out tea and they sat together, both of them rather quiet, he tried to tell her how truly he wished her to be happy.

"I s'pose you'll not often be back in Ardclare," he said. "Mr. Desmond will miss you terribly, Miss Desmond."

Georgie offered him some bread and butter, which he took, and said "Ta," rather piteously, she felt.

"Is it back? Of course I'll be back, like the bad half-penny. You'll not be rid of me as easy's all that."

"It must be very fine to be living in England," Mr. Finney said. "I was once in Fleetwood. Crossed over by Belfast."

"And I was never further than Dublin," Georgie said, her mouth full. "I hope I won't be sea-sick. I have an awful dread of the sea."

"And you're going to Paris, I'm told?" he asked.

"Yes." Georgie suddenly felt the nearness of all this sweeping change, and her throat grew dry, so that she gulped rather noisily at her tea. "You'll be good to Dada, won't you, Mr. Finney, and go see him in th' evenings? He'll miss me, I know."

"Surely he will," Mr. Finney replied wistfully.

"And all the fine times we had." She lingered over them in thought. "I go round now, looking my eyes out at everything, and trying so's I'll remember it all to my last hour. There's something fearfully queer about good-byes, isn't there?"

"But they're soon over," he said.

"The day after to-morrow," she added, and they both fell silent again.

"Well, I suppose I'd better be going." Mr. Finney got up and looked at her, and Georgie awakened from her dreams. "You can depend your life on my doing any little act I can for Mr. Desmond."

Their hands touched and fell apart, and he went to the door. The silver photograph frame he had given her caught his eye on the table with a quantity of other presents.

"Would you—" he stammered, "could I ask that your own photo would be in the frame, Miss Desmond? It's only a little thing, and not worthy in the least, but I'd like that you put your own photo in it."

"Indeed I will, Mr. Finney, *indeed* I will," Georgie said with emphasis. "It's too good of you, reely."

She was seeing him off when the Archdeacon arrived with Mr. Desmond. He was to officiate with Georgie's father, and his usually brusque and rather contemptuous attitude towards Dada had become amazingly polite and condescending.

"Mrs. Marsh and I wish to present you with a small token," he said, taking Georgie's hand with fervour. Mrs. Marsh had

formerly all but cut Georgie dead, for she was a strict follower of the Duncarrig tradition. "A Prayer Book and Hymnal combined," said the Archdeacon with unction.

"I'm awfully pleased." Georgie rang for more boiling water. "It's awf'ly good of you and Mrs. Marsh. I'm as keen as—I mean, I've always been very fond of a nice Prayer-book."

"With our united congratulations," added the Archdeacon.

She was glad when he left. The atmosphere of marriage in the house began to grow oppressively intense. Every one was taking it so seriously, and Georgie suddenly discovered that she was losing her nerve, and wished to run away and hide.

"Dada," she said, when the day was over, and they were alone, "I don't want to be married at all."

He had been sitting reading the local paper, and he looked up with startled eyes.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I don't want to go away," she said, and she began to cry.

"Nonsense," Mr. Desmond said sharply.

"I b'lieve I'd be best off in the finish if I'd taken Finney and gone to live in the cottage at th' end of the road. I'd not be going away, then, and I'd be near you."

"Finney? Marry Finney?" Mr. Desmond said in a voice of exasperation. "What are you talking of? You are engaged to a good, kind man, and at this hour you actually talk of breaking it off and marrying a fellow like Finney, who has practically no social position and no prospects. Not even a relative who might eventually leave him something."

Georgie continued to cry, and the sight only added to her father's extreme irritation. "It's come over me that I don't reely *know* Eustace," she said. "When he's there it's different, Dada darling, but when he isn't, and I think of his mother and his sister, Lady Mayfield, and then this friend of his coming to be best man, it frightens the life out of me. Suppose they're all like th' Duncarrig lot, when I get there. Won't I have a dreadful time of it with them?"

"Eustace will be your husband," Mr. Desmond said severely.

"You are marrying him, Georgie. His people may be all you yourself would wish. Eustace is a good young man——"

Georgie could never explain what impulse seized her when she broke in upon her father and said, "He is *not*."

Mr. Desmond looked at the fire and blew his nose.

"He isn't reely good," Georgie went on defiantly. "He was in a divorce case."

"I am surprised that you should vilify the man you say you love," he retorted, quite heatedly.

"It's true. He said it was." She dried her tears and lifted her chin defiantly.

"He has repented of his folly long ago," Mr. Desmond said judicially. "Such an occurrence is to be deplored, but at the same time you are doing very wrong if you allow yourself to judge him. I never expected to hear such things from your lips." He got up and seized the poker and beat upon the logs. "There must be no more of it. If you make me feel that Finney has come here to-day to try some means to insinuate himself into your affections, I shall be forced to refuse him admission to the house. It is too bad, quite preposterous. Go to bed at once."

"You've not read prayers yet, Dada," Georgie reminded him, and he sat down again and, snatching up the Archdeacon's gift, began to read in a rapid voice.

"You aren't vexed with me, Dada?" Georgie said penitently as she kissed his cheek. "Of course I'm happy and glad to be marrying Eustace, but there's times when it all looks so fearfully strange, and I get frightened."

Mr. Desmond was in no mood to encourage sentiment, and he only patted her hand and said, "There, there, that's enough," and she went uncomforted to bed.

For a long time she sat on the side of her bed and thought. Marriage was upon her at last. The goal towards which her energies had been directed, the open door out of her present life. By this means alone she could go into the other world of which she knew nothing, and, instead of being glad, she clung desperately to the familiar and the known; it was rather like facing death.

Georgie was aware most consciously that Eustace was a stranger to her, except in some emotional way, when she accepted him without question. One could trust to the emotional wave to carry one out to sea, but what about the ebb tide? The inevitable reaction which must surely follow? Did a wedding-ring really make it feel all right? Was there no danger of discovering that you knew that there *was* something wrong in it?

Georgie stared at the still, pointed flame of the candle, and

wondered. Wasn't there something that jarred the nerves about marriage, with all the publicity it entailed? If one could run off and tell nobody, it might be accomplished without the deadly realism arising from so many people having to know all about it. There were density and disillusion in the atmosphere, and she shut her eyes and shivered a little in spite of herself. What would be wrong to-day must be right to-morrow, and that was the general verdict of the world. She turned her pillow and looked fixedly at the opposite wall of her room.

Marriage opened a door. It lifted a charge off Dada's shoulders, and it was her duty to marry as well as she could. If you were not married by the time you were thirty, your chances dwindled, and only the good housekeeper, or the plain hardworking elder sister to a large family, ever managed to pull it off, if they had once reached those ominous years. The pretty girl who had flirted wildly was hopelessly done if she let the spring-time pass. The more she had flirted, the less chance for her, and Georgie realised her own danger.

But, after marriage? What next? She tried to think of anyone she knew who had made a signal success of the experiment. Dotted about in houses through the county, there were young couples she had known, and the thought of them did not encourage her at all. Clint as a bachelor was nearly perfect in her eyes, but to think of him as married, even though he was married to herself, dimmed his brilliance already. Fred Norcott had married Queenie French, and Fred had grown dull and didn't look the same, while Queenie drifted into a colourless wifedom which was totally unpleasing and not even interesting; and there were dozens of others, all much the same. Harold Jameson had been run after by most of the girls round Ardclare, but when he eventually married a girl he had met in London, and settled down and became the father of a family, Georgie marvelled that she had ever looked forward to his dances on her programme. Nor were they really happy together, for now the county talked of their mutual squabbles, and of Mrs. Harold's bad temper and lack of looks. Now her own feet were on the same path and in a little time she would be Georgie Clint, with an uncomfortable conviction that she still was really Georgie Desmond. She sighed deeply and extinguished her candle. One must accept it, and trust in the emotional wave to help one through with the beginnings of it all. When you grew quite old it mattered less. Old married

people usually appeared quite content and depended rather pathetically on each other. They had outworn their quarrels, and time smoothed out the wrinkles in that terrible bed of roses.

Then quite suddenly she fell in love with Eustace all over again, and decided that nothing could be more perfect than life spent in his society. She was the luckiest girl in Ireland, and as she hadn't a penny to her name the entire disinterestedness of his love was sure; for she did not know that Clint was always prepared to buy anything he wanted very much, and that though Georgie represented a piece of reckless extravagance, he felt he must have her. Nor did she understand that she herself had set the price at marriage.

The next day went through like a series of broken dreams, and brought Clint and Lord Comerforth to the hotel. Lord Comerforth seemed to feel that he was taking part in a huge joke and insisted upon talking with an assumed brogue. He addressed Georgie as a "colleen," and said "begorra" several times, and succeeded in making her thoroughly self-conscious and awkward. She thought that Eustace was not pleased with her, so that she became more and more pert and personal in her repartee, and Mr. Desmond was even affected by the advent of the new-comer, and lost some of his dim dignity of manner.

"There's the presents," Georgie said, conducting Lord Comerforth into the drawing-room, and indicating the table with a sweep of her hand. "You'd think they was all glad to be shut of me, wouldn't you now?"

"Objection, objection," Lord Comerforth said, rocking a little on his long legs. "I feel sure that these are the symbols of a holocaust of broken hearts."

"Broken hearts, indeed," Georgie retorted, as she picked up the little gifts carelessly and replaced them anyhow.

"Eustace told me that you were the Queen of Oireland," he said, looking at her quizzically.

"Then he told you a lie."

"Tut, tut! Come now! It is a self-evident fact, mademoiselle."

"I'm no more Queen of Ireland than you are a King of England," she said, touching her treasures fondly. "And you couldn't be that, because you have no beard."

He walked to the mantelpiece and leaned against it. Inwardly he was thinking that Eustace must be mad. The girl was pretty

enough, of course, and had her unsophisticated charm. A fiasco, indeed, and he saw a swift end to the roses and raptures of a brief honeymoon.

"Even if I had a beard : . ." he said. "But, then, with your sex, Miss Desmond, it is beauty which decides these things."

"And you're making it out that I'm a beauty!" she laughed. "That's a good one."

He watched her critically and decided that she was good-tempered. She would need to be, if he knew anything of Eustace; and from being sorry for his friend, he now grew sorry for her.

"Marriage is a bit of a plunge. What?" he asked.

"Are you married?" she replied.

"Not yet, only engaged."

She looked at him and reflected that it had made very little difference to him; he seemed detached, and she could not imagine what kind of woman he would love.

"Are y' in love?" she said, her eyes anxious.

"Why, I suppose so. We take these events rather calmly in my family. I've no Celtic fire, you see; I'm just a dull Englishman."

Georgie felt the remark to be so true that she must, out of politeness, contradict it at once.

"I expect you're fearfully *deep*," she said, and she looked at him flirtatiously.

Comerforth laughed. He was tremendously amused by the village flirt, and he began to like her better than before.

"You've got awfully pretty eyes," he said. "I wonder very much how you'll like us all, when you come to England."

"I'm in dread of my life of Eustace's mother," she replied confidentially. "Tell me, Lord Comerforth, is she nice?"

Comerforth screwed up his eyes and smiled. "She's rather antique," he said. "Dense, you know, and formal. But I expect her bark is worse than her bite, though she does bow-wow a lot. Don't knuckle under to her, show fight at once if she tries to squash you."

Georgie looked at him miserably. "Oh, my," she said. "It sounds something desperate."

"You won't care," he laughed. "Besides, Eustace can tame her."

"And what sort is Lady Mayfield? I ought to call her Eleanor, but it's frightfully difficult."

"Nell? She's all right," he nodded, encouragingly. "She isn't at all a bad sort. You'll get on with her, I expect."

Again Georgie sighed. "It's often I've wished Eustace was an orphan," she said disconsolately, and she looked so helpless that Comerforth was again moved to sympathy.

"They all live at a civil distance," he said. "The Gleanings isn't a house in a row."

"I wish it were," Georgie replied with unexpected vehemence, "I *do* wish it were. It's enough to frighten a person to have to be grand all of a sudden. Dada 'n I aren't a bit grand, and I don't know how I shall get along with it."

She was standing close to him, and unconsciously she touched his sleeve, her eyes still lifted, and, without stopping to consider that this act was a wholly reprehensible one, Lord Comerforth bent his head and kissed her. He had hardly done so, or recovered from his own surprise at himself, when Clint came in and looked at them both suspiciously. His face darkened at once, and he took Georgie by the arm.

"Why are you and Comerforth hiding away in here?" he asked.

"My dear chap, hiding isn't the word. We were looking at Miss Desmond's presents," Lord Comerforth said equably. "I was choosing which of them she is to hand on to me, when my turn comes."

"Oh, were you," Clint said less aggressively, but still dissatisfied. "Look here, Georgie, will you tell me . . ." and he talked on of the arrangements for the departure the following day.

But Georgie was in a bad mood. She would not let herself be led away to Dada's study to be kissed and scolded by Clint, but clung to the protective presence of the best man. She did not think again of his having kissed her so unexpectedly; it just didn't matter. But if Clint knew, there would be murder; and the amazing part of it was that Eustace had now a right to know, and, further, a right to object.

"What does Comerforth talk to you about?" he asked, when his friend took his departure.

"He told me that your mamma was rather a caution," she said, disentangling herself from his arms.

"And what about his own mother?" Clint said hotly. "She is a dreadful old woman, and he is afraid of her."

"Do Englishmen always have awful mothers?" she asked innocently.

"I call it confounded insolence for Comerforth to discuss my people. You should not have let him," he said impatiently.

"He said that Eleanor was all right."

"Very kind of him."

"He said I'd like her."

"What else did he say?" He eyed her with a return of suspicion.

"He told me about his engagement," she said quickly. "One of the first things he said."

Clint grew mollified and caught her in his arms again. "I'm so infernally jealous," he said. "Georgie, you don't know how I hate it, when I think you have made yourself cheap in any way. You are mine, mine, and belong only to me."

She relented and drifted to his clasp. This was the Eustace whom she knew and understood.

They were married by the Archdeacon, assisted by Dada, and the church was decorated as well as it could be at a time of year when flowers are scarce. Mrs. Dykes played the Wedding March, and Miss White stood beside Georgie, even though there were four bridesmaids, and seemed to hold an official capacity of some sort. Every one came to the wedding, and all were impressed by the bridegroom and the best man. It was like a repetition of King Cophetua's surprising conduct towards the beggar maid. It was romance made manifest. There were those who murmured, and wondered why none of Clint's people had come, but their voices were drowned by "O, perfect Love," played by Mrs. Dykes and sung by the choir; Mr. Finney's tenor more throaty and tremulous than usual. And then they collected in the vestry and signed the register, but Lord Comerforth did not kiss the bride, as some one suggested that he should.

Georgie looked back as she left the church, and the waves of harsh sound followed her into the gay world outside, and what she thought of in that moment, she herself could not have said.

The cutting of the wedding cake followed, and the tumult of noise and laughter filled the house. Was every one really as happy as all that? And then Georgie went up to her room with Miss White and took off her veil and wreath and the satin dress, made by Madame Murphy, and put on her travelling dress and

fur coat, and stood for a moment staring at her own face in the glass.

Miss White was crying quietly. Weddings always affected her, because she had never married anyone, and they called up ghosts of old dreams. "You are a lucky girl, Georgie," she said tenderly. "I am so glad you have made such a good match, after all."

Georgie turned and put her arms round her good friend. "Be good to Dada," she said in a whisper. "It's leaving him that is the hardest part."

"But you are going out into life," said Miss White, "and there is everything good in store for you."

"I know that." Georgie gave a wild glance round her. "But I'd best be quick over it."

They were to go by car to Mallow Junction, the place from where Clint had once turned back, and they departed amid cheers and confetti. Georgie was launched, and as Miss White had said, going out into life.

Lord Comerforth left by an afternoon train, and the day suddenly grew dull and uncomfortable, like some half-hearted Christmas Day which began too early and ended too late, and there were litter and confusion everywhere, because we can none of us either get married or die without leaving a *debris* behind us, which those who rejoice or those who mourn are obliged to clear up. So the sexton thought, as he took down the decorations and threw them into his dustbin, and Kate Love, with her broom, fighting the remains of the confetti out of the faded carpets, thought the same.

Georgie was gone. She had got married at last.

PART TWO

PART TWO

CHAPTER IX

AUTUMN returned to a still, blue world of wonderful days, and old memories began to awaken, as they do when the weeds are burning and the dahlias are dead. Once a fox hunter, always a fox hunter.

Georgie had come through the spring and the summer like a child who is alternately delighted and bewildered by a whole crowd of new surroundings and experiences. She was happy enough because Clint still looked exactly the same, and if he occasionally behaved rather differently, she took any alterations of manner much as one submits to a few bad days in a fine season.

The Gleanings was a huge place in her eyes, and Georgie was oppressed by the rigour of the staff of servants, whom she was nominally supposed to direct. They weren't a bit like Kate Love or Patsy, the man of all work, and she missed the intensely personal note to which she had been accustomed; she even missed the scoldings to which Kate had subjected her, and she knew that these indifferent people by whom she was now surrounded must inwardly regard her as a very contemptible mistress.

"Why do you always apologise when you give an order?" Eustace said over and over again. "Can't you understand they are paid to do their job?"

"They're so fearfully grand," Georgie said dubiously, "and they never say if they are pleased. Perhaps it is the way that they aren't never pleased at all."

The house stood on Bracken Hill, some way out of Oxford, and from the terrace in front, you could look over a wide, sweeping view to where, down in the valley, the outline of towers and spires was clearly visible. This was Oxford, known to Georgie by repute as an expensive place where young men went to take

their degrees. It interested her, because it was full of young men, and had a dashing reputation of a vague kind. Clint was the only Oxford man she had ever known.

All around her there were comfort and solidity. No one ate up scraps in The Gleanings, and the cost of upkeep alone was startlingly excessive in her eyes. The gardens were well kept, and the drive immaculate; the stables, though small, were the picture of what stables ought to be, and inside, the house was thoroughly well lighted, heated and furnished. Georgie's own room was a revelation to her. She had mirrors that reflected her at every angle, and one, in a wide Florentine frame, which was in itself a really beautiful decoration. The carpet was soft and the curtains would have made half a dozen brocade dresses for her, and on the dressing table there was an array of boxes with gilt tops to hold her trinkets and hairpins. Her first impression of The Gleanings was ecstatic, tempered a little by the feeling that it was all too heavy in its completeness.

She had accepted without comment the gorgeous effect of the expensive hotels where she and Clint had spent their honeymoon. They were her idea of hotels, and like those she had read of in books; but to come to a house which was nominally her home, and find that it lacked nothing, made her conscious of detachment. She could not curl up comfortably in this new house, and had a habit of peering along the passages to see that they were clear of her terrifying staff of servants, before she went from one room to another. There was not a single shabby corner in which she could feel entirely at home, and she asserted herself for the first time over the question of lady's maid.

"I'll not have a lady's maid," she said, as she sat in the smoking-room with Clint. "It's bad enough to have the under-housemaid watching me dress. Th' English are awfully stiff, Eustace, and when I tried to have a bit of fun with her, she looked as if she'd seen Peter Laffan's ghost."

"A bit of fun?" he said, looking up from his writing table.

"I didn't say much," Georgie replied. "I only asked her was it her the gardener was after?"

Clint threw down his pen. He was writing to his mother to tell her that he and Georgie would run up to London and stay with her for a week-end, as soon as she decided to name a date. He was going to speak hastily, but when he looked at Georgie he changed his mind and laughed.

"You ought to have a maid, I suppose," he said.

"Where's the ought? It's waste; and, besides, I don't know what to tell her do. Is it brush my hair? Can't I do that much myself, Eustace? And then her in and out of the room is so queer," she looked down and fiddled with a long amber chain she wore.

"Whatever you like," he agreed. "But you *must* begin to run the house on your own."

After a time she grew used to the servants, and gave her orders with more assurance, but she was entirely unmethodical, and her ways caused much comment in the servants' hall. They felt that she must have come out of some very queer place, and she did not impress them favourably. But she was happy, and Eustace encouraged her by his approval.

The visit to his mother's house in Cadogan Place was painful. Mrs. Clint was a large woman with a face the colour of parchment, and cold eyes with red veins in them. She disapproved totally of the wretched marriage her son had made, and only submitted because it was inevitable. There was nothing either fresh or original about her, and she belonged to a type too commonplace to be the least interesting.

She had already interviewed Lady Duncarrig on the subject of Georgie, and had been confirmed in her worst fears. Georgie, now so unfortunately her daughter-in-law, was a girl who had "got herself talked about," and for this there was no forgiveness, unless you had money or "position," when it might be overlooked. Georgie had no money, and Mrs. Clint considered that no girl with less than, at the very least, four or five hundred a year of her own, had the smallest right to expect a wealthy husband. Penniless, dowerless girls should marry bank clerks or curates, and when they forced themselves, unwanted, on families who might have looked far higher, they must not expect to be received with acclamations of joy. Furthermore, she had a strong feeling that the Irish were dirty; that they were liars and vagabonds, and that it was distressingly undignified to come from such a country. She regarded Georgie as though she were a spirited young Bolshevik, with a reputation for slaughter.

Georgie, on her part, was full of misgivings before she crossed the threshold of Mrs. Clint's house, and it in no way improved the circumstances when she found Veronica Stuart sitting in the drawing-room. She knew that Veronica ridiculed her pitilessly, and when she watched the greeting between her husband

and his mother, and the extreme cordiality with which Miss Stuart welcomed Eustace, she realised how completely out of it they intended her to feel.

Mrs. Clint accepted her passively, offered a large space of flabby cheek for her to kiss, and then ignored her altogether, while Veronica held out a hand and looked at her with unveiled hostility.

"Mother is always rather difficult," Clint explained when he and Georgie stood in the gloomy bedroom together. "She is a very clever woman."

"Is she?" Georgie replied, throwing her hat on to the bed. "I b'lieve she hates the sight of me. I wish we could go home."

"You'll have to get accustomed to us," he said, showing temper, "even if our standard of brains and manners is so much below that of Ardclare."

"And now you're mad," she retorted. "And you have the very eyes of your mother when you get cross."

"Do try and get on with her," Clint said, kissing his wife. "It's not for long, and for my sake you might try. I always did my best with your father."

"Dada? Dada's a lamb. No one could help loving him. Is it fair to compare him to your mother, Eustace? And he always so kind to you."

"Have it your own way," he said wearily. "I suppose women always fight."

The week-end was not a success, and it culminated in a fierce outburst during dinner on the last evening, for Georgie's pent-up feelings had got beyond control.

Mrs. Clint made a heavy political attack upon Ireland, with a view to making her feelings clear, and Georgie became suddenly aware that her country was wonderfully dear to her. At home she had been the mildest of politicians, and had regarded the English connection as a good thing, because she understood that if Ireland became a free and independent nation, the troops would be withdrawn. This was, in her eyes, a reason for upholding the Union; but under the lash of Mrs. Clint's tongue, Georgie became a Republican, and, what was far worse, could not be restrained from saying so.

"You should remember that the Irish are beggars," Mrs. Clint said with solemn rancour, "and that beggars cannot be choosers."

"Why not? That's the first I ever heard of it," Georgie retorted hotly.

Her former respect for England dwindled as she regarded Mrs. Clint. She wondered why she had been imposed upon in the past. Clint frowned at her, and sided with his mother. He told her that she was a silly little fool, and that she was ignorant of facts.

"Evidently Georgie sympathises with murderers," Mrs. Clint said in an awful voice as she rose from the table; and they retired to the drawing-room, where the remainder of the evening dragged through interminably.

"Why did you talk like that?" Clint asked when they were alone. "You were frightfully rude, Georgie."

"And what about her? Wasn't she rude to me?"

"She has very decided political opinions," he said.

"And may abuse the whole of us as much as she likes, and me sit there and say nothing at all? If you think I'm that kind, Eustace, you're wrong, because I'm not."

"But you never used to be a Republican," he argued. "Your father isn't one."

"Anyone would be, over here," she said. "You're enough to madden a saint with your superiority."

Eustace yawned. "Come to bed," he said. "You know what I think."

Not the most optimistic could have said the visit was a success, and Georgie left after a dreadful luncheon party at which Lady Duncarrig was present; she had been informed by Mrs. Clint that Georgie was a Republican, and once again Georgie became the target for barbed arrows. Lady Duncarrig said she was not surprised to hear it, and told dreadful tales of the conduct of Georgie's allies, addressing herself to Mrs. Clint, who seemed to swell even larger with satisfaction. Georgie was still too much afraid of Lady Duncarrig to retort, and felt that she had been beaten out of the field.

"I wonder you ever stay at Ardclare if that's the way you feel," she said, and Lady Duncarrig looked a little over her head and made no reply.

She left the house with a sense of misery, Eustace adding to it by his obvious disapproval. Georgie had looked small during lunch, and it affected his impression of her. She had come out of it badly, with no support, and he knew that both his mother and Lady Duncarrig felt that he had been let in and "caught."

They were friendly to him, and nothing which his wife had chosen to say or do altered their steadfastness; and when Georgie sat in the taxi beside him, with flushed cheeks and hard eyes, he wondered whether he had not been too precipitate and too hopelessly generous in his love for her.

It was forgotten after a week, and they grew happy again. Georgie was interested in the stables, and though she refused to learn to ride astride, she looked so well in her smart habit that he admired her once more.

Comerforth's sister had called, and a whole tribe of the people of the neighbourhood, and Georgie had been a success with them. They were obviously delighted with her accent, and thought her 'charming, and, in return, she responded and felt less like making war upon them all. Once again she had begun to conquer, and this kind of conquest was wonderfully easy. At Ardclare she had always been at a disadvantage. People snubbed her, and those of her own world did their best to reduce her in the public eye, so that it was a battle to keep her place; but the callers from the houses, big and little, along Bracken Hill acclaimed her at once, and so reinstated her with Eustace. The people who came from Oxford seemed to find her interesting, and when this was the case Georgie was always uncritical. By the time Comerforth brought his wife to Stanhope Hall, Georgie was firmly established, and could have faced Lady Duncarrig herself without fear.

It was some months before Clint's sister came to The Gleanings. She had been abroad with her cranky old husband, and left him in a nursing home in London to pay a visit to her sister-in-law.

"Whatever in the world is she like?" Georgie asked Eustace a dozen times a day as the date of her arrival drew near.

Clint did not invite Georgie to accompany him to the train to meet Lady Mayfield, and the brother and sister drove back together and exchanged confidences.

Eleanor Mayfield was an extremely pretty woman of thirty-six, and looked a good five years younger. She had never taken anything seriously in her life, and had a frankness of expression which was rather startling to those who were not accustomed to her. Her fair hair and brown eyes gave her an ethereal effect, though she was a complete materialist, and her mental range was that of a rather naughty child. There had not been the smallest hint of romance in her marriage with Sir Wilfred

Mayfield, who was old enough to be her father, and yet she was happy, because she had the slyness of a cat combined with the hearty approach of a puppy. She adored Eustace, and considered his marriage a huge joke, chiefly because it had irritated Mrs. Clint, whom she hated. Eleanor kept on friendly terms with the conventions through a steady process of good, hard lying, and she had never really loved any man, though she had gone through emotional storms with many.

She met Eustace with a lifted face and a very much lifted voice that rang through the station, and he took her by the arm as she chattered herself into the car.

"You didn't bring Georgie Porgie with you?" she said, making Lord Duncarrig's joke with great pleasure to herself.

Eustace said he had not, and wrapped the rug round their knees. "How's Wilfred?" he asked.

"Living on." She made a face at him. "He has a perfect passion for life. Does it on milk puddings now."

"Poor old girl," he said sympathetically, though Nell had married Wilfred with her brown eyes well open, even if she had not realised then how very long he was going to live.

"I don't mind," she replied generously, "if he *likes* it. I got him a perfect peach of a nurse."

Eustace laughed. "A bit late for that sort of consolation," he remarked, and Eleanor returned to the subject of Georgie.

"Mother *loathes* her," she said, with a gay little laugh. "She says that she looks like a servant."

"That's a damned lie," he replied. "She's awfully pretty."

"I'm sure she is." Nell gave him a sideways glance. "Which accounts for the milk in the coconut, old thing. You wouldn't have married a little nobody without a penny, if she hadn't been something of a looker."

"They didn't hit it off," he said gloomily.

"So I hear. I had a perfectly gorgeous time over it all. Mother was like a hearse, and more detestable than usual. She said that she could hardly understand what Georgie says. She speaks, I understand, with the *vox populi*."

Clint said nothing.

"Do you think she'll die soon?"

"Georgie?" He stared at her. "My God, no!"

"No, not Georgie, you silly idiot; I mean Mother. She is unhealthily fat, and her face is growing green."

"Mother? Oh, I don't know." And neither did Clint care.

"Tell me more about Georgie," Nell continued cheerfully. "Lady Duncarrig left her as much of a reputation as you could carry away on a threepenny bit. She has been extensively kissed. Some one saw a man to whom she had only just been introduced kissing her five minutes later. Do you allow her to be so friendly now?"

"All these stories are lies," he said emphatically. "She gets on very well here. Every one likes her. The Harpendens particularly, and they are old and stiff; if they like Georgie and have her to stay, I can't see why Mother should sit up and talk scandal."

"Then you don't know Mother, or appreciate the lights and shades of her psychology." Lady Mayfield leaned back and looked at the amber and blue world around her, as the car climbed the long, steep hill. "Are you still in love?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh, only so as I should know. Georgie hasn't a hanger-on, has she?"

Clint frowned and looked at his sister. There was something which he wanted to say. "Look here, Nell," he began, "it is quite true that Georgie was a bit of a flirt, but I want you to remember, in her case, that it was all very harmless, and that she has ideas about marriage and all that kind of thing that are rather strict. In fact," he laughed, "she is shockable. She got her back up over some quite trifling thing Comerforth said, and I was fool enough to let out to her that, though he is married, he hasn't said an eternal farewell to Dolly Ace. I hadn't any idea of the fuss it would occasion." He struck a match and lighted his sister's cigarette. "When they come to The Gleanings, Georgie won't look at the same side of the room as Comerforth, and thinks he is a blackguard. . . . I'm only warning you. Do, for God's sake, be careful not to give anything away connected with me."

"Then she's a Puritan?"

"Not exactly. But she's out of a rectory, and she's Irish. It seems to make people narrow on these subjects."

"*Mon Dieu et Mon Roi!*" Lady Mayfield remarked. "And Mother practically accused the girl of being all but one of *ces dames*. I do hope she isn't a wet blanket."

"You'll see her directly," he said as they drew up at the door, and Georgie herself appeared on the steps.

Clint watched his sister's face, and knew at once that she was disappointed. Georgie was not sufficiently beautiful.

"Hallo!" Eleanor said, getting out of the car. "So this is you, is it, Female?" and she put her hands on Georgie's shoulders and kissed her; their eyes studied each other intently.

"I'm fearfully glad to see you," Georgie said enthusiastically. "I was afraid you'd be like Mrs. Clint."

"Heaven forbid!" Eleanor took her arm and climbed the steps. "She's a hateful woman, Female, and has hairs on her chin."

Georgie's eyes grew round, and she led the way into the smoking-room.

"I was sorry to hear that Sir Wilfurd was ill," Georgie said from behind the tea-table, handing Nell a cup of tea.

"His name is Wil-fred, though I think I like 'Wilfurd' better; and he's in a nursing home," Lady Mayfield remarked carelessly.

"My God!" Georgie said emotionally. "How shocking. I'm awfully sorry to think of it."

"Well, I'm not," Lady Mayfield remarked, "so don't worry."

Georgie was spellbound by her new relation. She had never before met any one who seemed to put into words every thought she had. There was nothing, either human or divine, that baffled Eleanor, or withheld her from her outspoken habit. Not one shadowy corner was kept for anything sacred, and she knew no reserve; at least, that was the first impression. Georgie felt abashed before it all.

"Isn't Nell a caution?" she said to Clint when Lady Mayfield at last departed to change her dress.

"Well, you can't complain of her being *dull*, anyhow," he said with a touch of temper.

"I wasn't faulting her. I only said she was a caution."

"Sometimes," he said slowly, "I wish you would speak English," and he walked out of the room.

Georgie sat down and began to think. She liked Nell. That much she could honestly say; but her experience of other women was limited, and this tremendous freedom of speech was so new in her ears. What would Dada think of her? How honest Nell had been about Mrs. Clint. Nothing, Georgie herself felt, could approach the critical attitude of Mrs. Clint's own daughter, for Georgie leavened her dislike with the respect due to white hairs. Still, it seemed cruel.

Then she remembered that Eustace had been cross. He was often cross now, so that she did not notice it particularly, and she lay back in her chair and watched the fire.

Suddenly she began to think of the drawing-room in the Rectory with a passionate longing. What fun it would be to go back there again, and to sit and talk to Finney and Milson Rogers. You could have a bit of fun over there, without any real unkindness, and she wondered whether she had not lost more than she would ever gain by the exchange. In her way, Georgie was a humble but indefatigable seeker after truth, and she began to review her feelings carefully, for illusion was evaporating steadily with the months. She had, in fact, ceased to swing her censer before the altar, and was looking her god in the face rather blankly.

Was not Nell, for all her effect of smartness, her good clothes, her exotic face-powder and her scent, just a little vulgar? Was not her savage attack upon Mrs. Clint a sign of some deep lack of the essential courtesies of life, and was Eustace a "lovely man" in any real sense? He was her husband, so she slid quickly away from the question. Husbands had to be perfect. Nell, in her strange courage, would have hung, drawn and quartered him, giving him credit for his looks and his physical charm, but then Nell really did consider her brother perfection.

A low voice in Georgie's heart whispered doubts; she stifled it, and reviewed the position more or less geographically. "Th' English" were different. Their code was not hers. Eustace as good as said so during the row they had about Comerforth. Comerforth, whom she knew very well to be ready to open fire upon her on the slightest encouragement. She looked back upon her own past flirtations, and sighed. What fun they had been. But here a flirtation was a labyrinthine performance, leading to queer underground burrows, where people pretended to hide.

Then there was Religion. Georgie was a Protestant. She still went regularly to church and said her prayers. In Ireland people went to a lot of trouble to attend service, and many even attended evening church; she missed the social feeling of it, and she would have liked Clint to go with her, but he always made an excuse. The truth was, they did not believe in anything except motor-cars and some main political principle which was established to keep out the hungry masses. Georgie gasped a little as she allowed herself to admit this to be the case. Nell's

habit of truthfulness was catching, and it made her nerves jump. She felt the big room become suddenly airless.

Georgie ruffled her hair with an abstracted hand. These people caused her an internal sense of chill. People who could not worship, and who, though you might not meet them in night clubs, or dirty restaurants, were oddly brutal in their attitude. What did they know of the shy, happy world where you might make love, and still have nothing to be ashamed of when it was all over?

She got up reluctantly. If only she could go back to Ireland for a few weeks, alone. To bring Clint with her would spoil it all; the idea of leaving him never crossed her mind. Husband and wife must remain together, and if she went back without him it would look "queer." There was no use thinking of that.

CHAPTER X

WHEN the first effect of Lady Mayfield's arrival had begun to wear off a little, Georgie adopted a habit of discounting what she said. That explained it: Nell did not mean what she said. She was a grown-up child, and her acts or her speech were not to be regarded seriously. A bright, sophisticated child of some hard, gold dawn, she had been exempt from the troublesome rules of everyday mortals.

Clint delighted in her company, and brother and sister were deeply attached to one another, so that Georgie fell a little into the position of the third wheel, and made tactful excuses to keep away when they seemed to have plans from which she might reasonably exclude herself. She need not have troubled, but it made it easier for her, rather than for Lady Mayfield, who would merely have kissed her and said, "We don't want you, Female, so sit down and twiddle your nice thumbs."

Oddly enough, Georgie did not resent her lonely afternoons. She had found one or two views which had just a touch of home about them. And this was strange. Fancy seeking desperately for Ardclare when you had worked heaven and earth to leave Ardclare for ever.

One bright, clear afternoon, when a touch of the brief sadness of autumn came upon her, Georgie decided to take her bicycle and go down to Oxford. The idea was quite exciting, and she put on a little blue suit and a close-fitting cap and set off. She had been to Oxford and trailed dismally around the colleges in the wake of an irascible little professor, who seemed to be some kind of clergyman, and who openly disliked her. He had known Eustace during his undergraduate days and could be friendly, but he ignored Georgie when she said, "Oh, gracious!" for the twentieth time, having really nothing else to say about her impressions.

Oxford in company with a professor was a mental strain. In company with Clint, it meant that she was rushed and pushed, because he was usually in a hurry; but alone, it promised adventure. There is always a chance of adventure to any

solitary setting forth, for the young and ardent, and Georgie was almost ashamed of her own zest at the prospect of being "reely solo" for a bit.

Her spirits rose as she sped down the hill and came nearer to the pencilled outlines of the many spires and the dome of the Radcliffe Camera. When she had been told all about these buildings, and dates had been forced upon her, she hated them, but once she could forget historical facts, Oxford became beautiful; she had no use for William of Wykeham or Robert d'Oigli, but her heart was raised by the fretted spires, clear against the pale, soft blue of the sky.

As she crossed Folly Bridge, the bells began to greet her, or they might have warned her "to turn again, turn again" and go home, for lonely adventures are sometimes dangerous.

She left her bicycle at the Teutonic-looking hotel opposite the Ashmolean, and began to wander along the streets, peering in through archways, and finding drama in the hasty glimpses she snatched through doors which were prohibited to all but members of the University. She had a jumbled impression of old grey quadrangles, curtained by gorgeous crimson creepers; chapels where it was dark, and the stained glass comforting and rich in its dim burning colours, and crowds of people whom she did not know. Just faces. Heaps and heaps of faces.

The evening began to grow gusty and wild as she found herself standing in the High Street, and again the achingly, sweet summons of the bells broke loose into the sunset. All Saints, St. Mary's, the Cathedral bell, speaking to the burnished sky, the sound soaring upwards over the high, irregular line of roofs, on its way to the evening star.

Beyond what adventures one may experience through the eyes, or a general feeling that a place is touched with magic, Georgie so far had none, and she decided to go back to St. Giles' Place and have tea in the hotel. It was coming to earth with rather a bump, but it seemed the only sensible thing to do. She prayed that she might not meet Clint's former tutor, who kept poultry and had looked like an irritated hen. She imagined that he would feel bound to ask her to tea, because she still fancied, in her Irish way, that even if people disliked you, they offered you tea if they found you far from home. She need not have troubled her heart. Clint's tutor had already seen and recognised her, and immediately crossed the road to avoid the necessity of so much as raising his hat.

Street lamps starred the half-light, and shop-fronts showed yellow patches as she went through the hustling crowd which overflowed the pavement, and she had very nearly got as far as St. Giles' Place when a man, coming towards her, stopped full in her path.

"I thought it was you," he said, taking off a rather dilapidated hat, and giving an amused little laugh. For a moment she did not recognise him, and then she recalled the party to Ardclare, when Clint had forsaken her for Veronica.

"Surely to goodness, it's Mr. Lousada!" she said joyfully. The day was not to be quite empty after all. "Well, of all the shocks! What brought you here?"

"And I might retort," he replied, "why are you here? I assure you it is a far more awful thing for you to be in Oxford than for me."

"Isn't that a nice way to talk?" Georgie replied. "Awful, indeed!"

"I said awful, and I mean awful. Awful means awe-inspiring, and awe is a feeling of sacred dread."

"Well, I want a sacred tea," she said. "Will we have it together? I'm married and done for since we met. You heard that, I s'pose?"

Lousada made no direct reply, but they turned, and he walked along beside her.

"Where do we have tea?" he asked. "There is an Irish tea-shop somewhere. That should be appropriate."

"There's no tea like Irish tea," Georgie agreed cheerfully.

"Even when it comes from India, Ceylon or China?"

"It comes from Ireland," she said stoutly; and they walked up a narrow flight of steps into a small, warm room, where Lousada found a table in an alcove, cut off a little from the rest.

"Why, it's like old times." He looked at her again and smiled.

"And you don't never drink tea," she remembered triumphantly.

Last time they had met she felt afraid of him, but now her fear had vanished. She was so much more sure of herself, and that day she had been very miserable indeed.

"And who is Eustace Clint giving tea to *this* time?" he inquired.

"His sister, Lady Mayfield. D'you know her, Mr. Lousada?"

"Yes," he said carelessly.

"Isn't she up-to-date?"

"I can't say. I'm no good at dates." His eyes smiled again.

"D'you like her? I know I oughtn't to be asking personal questions. Eustace is for ever at me, not. But do you like her?"

"A little of her goes a good long way," he replied. But his voice informed her that he was not interested.

"You've not wished me joy over my marriage," she said, pouring out a cup of tea for herself. "Glory! Man! I wish you'd drink. It's so queer to be watched."

"Shall I sit with my back to you, then?" he asked.

"Don't mind me at all." She looked at him with her vivid eyes and shook her head.

"So you get on all right with Clint's people?"

Georgie's mouth was full, and she drank quickly. "I believe no one alive gets on with Mrs. Clint," she said. "But Nell is the grandest fun. Anyone'd get on with her."

"And they are all doing their level best to spoil you."

"Is it spoil? I don't know all about that. I'm often in disgrace with poor Eustace."

"I meant another kind of 'spoil,'" he said. "It's a queer word, and means a heap of different things."

"You're awfully good at words," she replied. "D'you read the dictionary, now?"

"Not now," he remarked. "Have a cigarette?"

"Will I shock these proper-looking people at the middle table if I do?" she asked, taking one from his case as she spoke.

"They don't seem to me to matter particularly," he said absently.

"All right, so." Georgie lighted her cigarette. "Anyhow, half the fun is shocking people, isn't it?"

"Have you succeeded in shocking Lady Mayfield?" He had lighted a cigarette, and returned his case to his pocket.

Georgie screwed up her lips. "I'm not fit," she said with a slightly perplexed look. "It would take more than the likes of me to shock her."

Lousada looked at her steadily and said nothing for a time.

"So you are happy," he remarked at last. "You did what you wanted to do?"

She put her elbows on the table and began to reflect carefully.

"Yes, I am happy. Of course, it's not old times, you'll understand, and one grows a bit lonesome for the past. But it's all

in the day's work, and Dada is happy." Her eyes grew soft as she spoke of her father. "You see, I'm awfully fond of Dada."

He nodded silently.

"There's days when I feel that Finney might have been best for me."

"Finney? Was he one of them?"

"No," she made a movement of her hands. "I never flirted with Finney, but I could easily have married him."

"If you had, you might still be saying much the same things," he suggested, and he seemed sure of what he said. "That is how life usually tricks us."

"Oh, well . . ." Georgie grew vague.

"And the flesh-pots are a success?" he swept her face with his keen, intense look. "And will continue to be sufficient?"

"Why not?" she asked quickly.

"Exactly. Why not? Only a question."

"I'm crazy about Eustace," she retorted defiantly.

"And he? Is he a devout husband?" He pulled himself up quickly. "Forgive me, I am becoming impertinent."

"Indeed you are," she said a little stiffly. "It's as if you didn't much like Eustace. Aren't you thick with him?"

"I know him very little. We were here together, but not what I should call friends."

"Is that so?" Georgie remarked in surprise.

"But you must not jump to the conclusion that I dislike him. Perhaps you would be nearer the truth if you felt that I like you rather better."

She wondered again for a moment, and then laughed cheerfully.

"Like or dislike, it's late hours, Mr. Lousada, and time for this infant to be on the road for home. Oh, it's a fearful bother to have to change my clothes, every *tack*, or the servants think you were brought up poor, and they hate the poor."

"Every tack!" he repeated. "What a trial!"

"And all silk," she said confidentially. "Fearfully expensive."

She got up, and Lousada paid the bill and followed her out into the Broad, where a clear moon was illuminating the foreign-looking street. Georgie stood gazing upwards for a time, her hands clasped.

"It's like a prayer," she said suddenly. "When I look at the moon I wonder at ourselves, Mr. Lousada, and why it is we aren't different."

"Don't be any different," he said slowly. "Don't let them change you. Call things what you always called them, and put up a fight for your individuality."

"They might snap at you, and say I couldn't be changed," she said as they walked into the black shadows of the houses, "and all this time we've said nothing at all about you. Isn't that too bad?"

"There isn't anything to say," he replied.

"Why are you here? What are you up to? D'you know, I don't even know what you *are*?"

"A thing of shreds and patches," he said. "A wanderer, no silk or anything handsome about me."

"Are you an author?" she asked tentatively. "You have a look of something unusual."

"God forbid!" he spoke emphatically. "No, I'm one of those loose ends, that you hear about."

Georgie considered for a moment. She felt that he must have an occupation of some kind. Detail was precious to her, and she liked to be informed upon all points. She wished to know where he had been to school, and whether he had a place of his own. If his mother and father were alive; if he had any sisters, and the date of his birthday, as well as how old he was.

"I expect you're a heap older than Eustace," she remarked as an opening.

"So much younger, that we might have been born in different ages," he said shortly.

"Gracious! Is that so? You don't look less than thirty."

"I wasn't thinking of years." He took her elbow to pilot her through the crowd of people. "It is a matter of instinct. Your Eustace is, unfortunately for himself, a survival. Always a bad mistake."

"What happens to survivals?" she asked rather anxiously.

"They get swept away."

"Swept away!" she echoed with a little gasp. "But what do you *do*? Are you a solicitor? I once knew a very nice solicitor. He rode well, and had light hair and a good practice. Sometimes they're very nice men."

"I work in a dirty, antiquated Government office," he said, "where I do what I'm told, more or less."

They had reached the hotel, and Georgie stood on the steps as he went inside to get her bicycle. People were arriving and departing, and she watched them with interest. There were

such thousands of people in the world; most of them in a hurry, and rather cross. They behaved as if there was no one else there, and she was pushed about by them, as they passed in and out, occupied by their own affairs. At last Lousada joined her and wheeled her bicycle into the road.

"When will I see you again?" she asked.

Lousada shook his head. "I don't know."

"But I will see you, won't I?"

"If Fate decides that we meet, we shall meet."

She looked at him and wondered. He was not "a lovely man" like Eustace, and his clothes were neat rather than smart, while his hat was a disgrace. Yet he looked commanding though he was not tall, and there was something very memorable in him, which she could not define.

"Is it leave it to Fate?" she asked, a little distressed by his indifference.

"Entirely so. Appointments are futile things. It is far more interesting to find out what may or may not be significant."

"You're awfully troublesome to understand," she fingered the shining handle bar of her bicycle, "I haven't an idea what you mean. Reely, now."

Lousada took off his hat and smoothed his reddish hair. He was laughing to himself, and he shrugged his shoulders. "We met by sheer accident, the first time," he said.

"Yes, you tramping over my feet," she agreed.

"To-day it was another accident. Had I tried to see you, I might have failed, or met you at the wrong time, which is worse than not meeting at all."

"Oh, I see," she grasped at his idea. "It's a game."

"Exactly. Hide-and-seek, of a kind," he nodded. "Rather fun, in a way, don't you think?"

"I s'pose so," she was still a little reluctant. "You'd not come and call at The Gleanings?"

"Not for anything," he said with conviction.

"Then good-bye to you." She held out her hand, which he took rather limply.

"Thinking of all those tacks?" he asked.

"Yes, bad luck to them."

She mounted her bicycle and sped away like yet another shadow flitting through the great, draughty space of St. Gile's, but her heart was light, and the dim hall of memories did not claim a thought from her. She was pleased with her little ad-

venture, because it was at once intriguing and innocent. Perhaps she had been rather free in her comments upon Mrs. Clint, for she found it difficult to remember or believe that Clint's people were her people, and his god her god. Lousada was different to anyone else she knew, and he had made a very definite impression on her mind. She had not discovered who he really was but she felt that he was important in spite of what he said. He had been at the Duns', which, in itself, was a certificate. The Duns did not entertain unauthorised young men; but he had not said anything of his own people, nor whether he was engaged to be married.

She arrived late for dinner, and came into the dining-room half-way through the meal. Eustace looked very well pleased with himself, and a girl called Averil Markham, who seemed to have arrived from nowhere, was added to the party. Ostensibly she was a friend of Nell's.

"I met Averil, motoring herself to Wantage," Nell said as Georgie was introduced, "and asked her to stay for the week-end here. You are pleased, are you, Woman?"

"I'm reely delighted," Georgie said hospitably. "It's grand. I hope you have all you want?"

Miss Markham looked at her with a slight smile. She was a dark-haired girl with a pale face, and wore a curiously embroidered green dress. She appeared to be very young, and yet Georgie felt like a child as she returned the steady look.

"If I had everything I want, I should explode," she replied in a voice which sounded like artificial waves beating on a purely imaginary beach, but for all that, was musical and attractive.

"She talks like that at first," Lady Mayfield explained. "Don't you, old rat?"

"I mean, did you have a bath?" Georgie asked earnestly. She wished to be the complete hostess.

"Good egg!" Nell laughed unrestrainedly. "Georgie Porgie is thinking of a workhouse. They always scrub the incoming guests on arrival, Av, for necessary and sufficient reasons."

"You're very late," Clint said, making his first remark since she entered the room. He really did look extremely handsome, Georgie thought, and the Greek line of his features gave him a lingering touch of something more striking than a merely good-looking modern. She caught her new guest looking at him also, as she smoked, with silent interest, and she told herself how lucky she was.

"I went down t'Oxford," she said, hurrying through her soup. "And who in the world should I meet but Lousada."

"Rotten fellow," Eustace remarked sharply. "We were at the House together. Not that I ever had anything to say to him."

"Lousada? Oh, rather a pet," Lady Mayfield chimed in. "I've always wondered what he would be like if he were madly in love with me. He isn't, that's the tragedy. Did you ask him here, Female?"

"I did, but he won't come. Isn't it awfully funny, Nell?"

"A perfect scream," she replied. "No one can fathom the depths. I wonder if you could, Av, you're so deep yourself."

Miss Markham aroused herself for a moment from her thoughts, and replied that he was a bore.

"Did you talk to him?" Eustace asked more pacifically.

"We had tea at th'Irish tea shop. At least I had. He doesn't never drink tea. Fancy that, Eustace. He said you'n he had been at college together."

"What is he doing in Oxford?"

"I don't know a bit about him," Georgie replied. "But it was the grandest fun. He says the queerest things."

"What sort of things?" Averil asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Talks of Fate and all that. . . . He believes in Fate."

Lady Mayfield glanced at her brother. "You'd better look into this, *mon brave*," she remarked. "We all know where that kind of conversation leads to."

Miss Markham returned to her thoughts, and her eyes wandered momentarily to Clint's face.

Later on in the evening Georgie discovered that Miss Markham wrote poems, which she felt accounted for her unusually composed manners. Averil sat with two long silk-stockinged legs thrust out, and added very little to the conversation, but Clint, who appeared to appreciate her silence, kept her supplied with cigarettes.

"Is she awfully clever?" Georgie asked him, when he came yawning into their room, wearing a gorgeous suit of pyjamas. "I don't like the shape of her nose. There was a girl in Ardclare in the draper's shop with the exact same of a nose, and I never liked her. She married a cooper."

Georgie's reminiscences of Ardclare did not inspire Eustace. "Miss Markham is a niece of Lady Standerton's," he remarked, "so there can hardly be any relationship."

She felt that he intended his reply as a snub.

"Maybe, but she has the exact ditto of a nose as Ellen Flynn, only Ellen would never sit and show her legs that way. Did you notice it, Eustace?"

Georgie was sitting up in bed, her thick plaits falling over her white shoulders. How pretty she was, he thought, and how dreadfully her speech was beginning to jar.

"When you say things like that," he replied, "you only show your own ignorance."

"Ignorance? Surely to goodness, I know legs when I see them," she laughed, "and so do you, Eustace. Miss Markham has an eye," Georgie shook a finger at him. "Didn't I catch her at it. She was gazing and gazing at you."

He made a remark under his breath, which she did not hear.

"It's my belief," she continued archly, "that it wasn't Nell she came to see after all, or if she did, when she caught sight of you, she made up her mind to stop on."

"Georgie," he said, "don't talk like that."

Her face changed and she looked hurt. "It was all by way of no harm," she answered, crestfallen and distressed. "You know I meant nothing but a bit of fun. If the girl took a fancy to you, what matter? I was awfully gone on Duncarrig one time, myself, when I was sixteen. Praying that Lady Dun'd die, and give me an innings. I used to dream of him, reely I did, and when he'd be reading the lessons, I shivered like an aspen. If Miss Markham had a fancy for you, itself, I'd be the last to wonder at her, Eustace, for don't I know what a Ben Juan you are?"

"I suppose you mean *Don Juan*," he said, still irritated. "And if you do, it's not altogether complimentary."

"You're a fine man, God bless you," she said, snuggling into his arms. "Lousada can't touch you in looks, whatever it may be when it comes to brains."

Eustace kissed her. He still liked kissing her, but the idea that Lousada had made fun of her haunted him.

"I hope you were careful of what you said. Lousada is not a man to confide in."

"I think so," she replied. "He's awfully nice, Eustace, *reely* nice, I mean. Not like Comerforth."

"You are idiotic about Comerforth," he said sleepily. "He is no different to anyone else."

Georgie's body grew rigid. "That's a lie," she said, awaking

him from the edge of slumber. "To be married to a nice, decent girl like Constance, and go on as he does is scandalous. If you were that sort, I'd—God! What would I do?"

"Well, I'm not. Only it's nothing unusual," he replied, and after that he refused to speak any more.

CHAPTER XI

AVERIL MARKHAM flitted away in her car without having been once seen to speak to Clint, except when he gave her cigarettes. She just sat there with her elegant legs well in evidence, and thought, but she did not say what she was thinking of. Georgie concluded that she was composing poetry, and should not be disturbed; so she and Nell continued to chatter together, their combined voices giving the effect of a magpie and a thrush holding a public meeting.

"Tell it not in Gath!" Georgie said, when Miss Markham had put on her leather coat and departed, "but I'm glad to be shut of her, Nell. Isn't she awfully silent?"

"She's a queer cove," Lady Mayfield replied. "Always up to something, and no one has ever caught her out"; she looked at her sister-in-law reflectively. "You are the very opposite to Averil, you funny little creature. I can quite understand why our sainted mother hates you. You are so amazingly frank. Averil is a born intriguer, and even I don't really know her in the least."

Georgie was arranging a vase, and her eyes were on a group of tawny chrysanthemums. "Th'English are queer," she said. "Would you believe it now, Nell, but to this day I'm never sure what Eustace is thinking about."

"Nothing," Eleanor replied with a laugh. "He doesn't think, he goes on without. Are you as devoted as ever, you two?"

"Why, of course we are."

"No sign of any sons or daughters?" Lady Mayfield inquired; and Georgie looked confused and startled.

"Why, no," she said quickly. "But there's time enough, isn't there?"

Lady Mayfield put a chocolate in her mouth, and shut one eye. "It would be a bore," she said judicially. "Yet, in a way, it's rather a safe move. Eustace is the kind of man who would like children, and go bounding up to the nursery, two steps at a time, and get a heap of value out of fussing over them. I think, if I were you, I'd do it."

Georgie laid down the flowers she held, and looked at Eleanor. "It's not the way that I don't want any," she said, her eyes lowered, "I'd love to have one, indeed I would, only I s'pose one must be patient."

Lady Mayfield stared at her rather blankly. "Then, you mean you haven't been putting it off?"

Georgie returned the blank look, with another quite as blank. "Surely to goodness, how could I?" she asked. "It's fate, I s'pose."

Eleanor stifled a laugh. "You holy innocent," she said evasively. "I might have known that. Only it's a pity." She looked round the bright room and considered for a time. "It's very *necessary*, for your own sake. If you don't anchor Eustace, he may grow restive; tie a man on to a perambulator, and he'll stay put, in nine cases out of ten."

Georgie shook her head. "It's the will of God," she said with solemnity.

Once again Lady Mayfield appeared to be on the verge of an outbreak, but she conquered herself with an effort. She was growing to understand Georgie better, and concluded that the distant rectory was answerable for much.

"Don't be an ass, old dear," she said. "It is a world of progress, and if I were you, I'd go and see a specialist."

"Then I'll not," Georgie replied, crimson in the face. "I'd not think it a nice thing to do at all."

"You needn't tell Eustace."

"I tell Eustace everything," she answered, coming to the fire and stretching out her hands. "I'd call it mean, not to. When you're married you ought to have no secrets."

"If I were to tell Wilfred everything, he'd have a fit," Eleanor said argumentatively. "It might be an idea, really, but in decent society, Georgie, we don't."

"Eustace hasn't secrets," Georgie said defiantly.

"Do you mean that he gave you a detailed account of his patchwork past? Nonsense, it would have taken a year."

"I know about the divorce case, if that is what you mean," Georgie said, averting her eyes. "But it's too bad to be discussing him this way. Since we got married it's been different."

"Have a chocolate?" Lady Mayfield offered the white box. "And don't be idiotic. All men are the same. Once they get what they want you have to find some other way of keeping

them. Some women play around, and keep up competition, but my theory for you and Eustace, is a nursery."

Georgie helped herself absently. "I don't feel that way," she said slowly. "Husband and wife are husband and wife."

"Have it your own way then," Lady Mayfield said pacifically, "only don't blame me if he gives you trouble."

"He'll not give me trouble, and I'll blame it on no one," Georgie said. "You and Wilfred are different. He's an old gentleman, I'm told, and naturally you'd not feel the same, even though he is very nice."

"Which he isn't," Nell retorted. "He is a horried old man, Georgie. If I were to tell you the things I know about him, you'd faint or scream, so I'll spare you."

Georgie looked at her pitifully. It seemed so sad. "I'm awfully put out to hear that," she said. "Couldn't you get separated? Dada thinks that divorce is an awful sin, but I once heard him say that he thought if people hated the sight of each other 'twas best they should part. Mightn't you part Wilfred?"

"No such luck," Lady Mayfield said cheerfully. "There are heaps of reasons why I have to stick it out, and it's not so bad as it looks, mind you. I married him because he was a very rich man."

Georgie stared at the fire. She could understand this point. She too had known the pressure of circumstances in the past.

"Wasn't I one of the lucky ones?" she said with a sigh of content. "Imagine it, Nell, to be marrying the man I wanted, and he is as rich as a Jew into the bargain."

"All the same," Lady Mayfield urged, "you should take measures to keep him, Female; it's only common sense."

"He never looks at anyone else." Georgie tossed her head, and Lady Mayfield studied her rings, holding her fingers close to her nose, and said nothing in reply.

Georgie was sorry for Nell when she thought over their conversation. She meant kindly, but her ways were other than those of th' Irish, and so her advice was wasted. It was true that Georgie had married one of th' English, which caused Nell to consider herself an oracle, but she did not know Eustace. Georgie had a strong feeling that husband and wife were one, and that it was not Lady Mayfield's business to offer advice, however kindly she meant it.

A few days later her sister-in-law went away, and left rather

a blank behind her. Eustace missed her even more than Georgie, but again the steady current of their lives caught them and they drifted contentedly onwards.

Christmas came and passed, and the New Year brought them the first anniversary of their wedding. Georgie recalled it all in detail, and her memories of Ardclare awoke and cried. She sent good presents to Dada and Miss White, and read their letters with avidity. The smallest piece of news was cherished, and she was almost fretful because they all told her so little. She wanted to know the private affairs of every one in Ardclare, and they seemed to imagine that in her life of gaiety she would not be interested in Mary Fagan's wedding with the postman, or to hear what had happened to Amy Sherrard, the servant at the hotel. She read of Mr. Finney's engagement to a girl from Cork with a kind of pang. He was marrying a Catholic, and Mr. Desmond felt that he had fallen from grace. It was whispered that he went to Father O'Carrol to "receive instruction," and he no longer sang in the Ardclare choir. Feeling was running high on the subject, and Mr. Finney was socially damned.

The Duncarrigs were in residence again and, as Georgie already knew, Veronica was engaged to a Spanish count who was also there on a visit, to the excitement of the whole neighbourhood. Milson Rogers had begun to keep racers and was making it pay, and "me grandmother" was still alive, but had to be kept in ignorance of the fact, for she disapproved of racing as well as of cards, and believed that her grandson upheld her views. He still attended church, morning and evening, on Sundays, and was good to Mr. Desmond.

In the heavy Christmas atmosphere of The Gleanings, Georgie's heart grew sore with longing for her home, and she even suggested to Eustace that they might go over to Ireland, just for a week.

"It would be grand t'see Dada again, and dear old Miss White. I'd give the eyes out of my head for a sight of them all, Eustace."

"We can't go," he answered, looking up from a letter written on paper of a curious green shade, which was covered with straggling writing, unfamiliar to Georgie, and as she got up and came from her place to where he sat, he slipped it into his pocket. "How can we? The Duncarrigs haven't asked us there, and the hotel is vile."

"You usen't to think so, darling," she said, her hands on his shoulders. "Once you had it that 'twas reely a nice place enough, and I'd not mind. I'm well used to it of old."

"Things were different then," he said, looking at her critically. "Who on earth gave you that awful horseshoe brooch?"

Georgie flushed and drew away. "'Twas Dada's present to me, and I value it more than anything I got," she replied. "Dada's the dearest lamb, isn't he, to think of me, and so don't be contemptuous, Eustace. Your mother sent me an account book. What sort of a present is that? Oh, my! Do you remember how ratty you were last year with poor Finney and his cakes of soap? He's marrying a Catholic, and they are all out with him now. I'd like to see him, Eustace, and all the rest of them."

"It's an awful gossiping little hole," Clint said firmly. "They tore you to bits, Georgie, all these friends of yours. Why do you want to go and stir them up again?"

"Because I do," she said, her eyes full of thoughts. "Dada would be delighted, and Miss White, let alone Milson. Did I tell you he's not consoled, so far?"

Clint made a sound of disgust. "Dreadful creature," he said. "I thought you had learnt better."

"Ah, now," Georgie began to coax, and put her head on his shoulder. "One week, Eustace, just to please me? I like dearly to be here, but to go over t' Ireland would be the finest old fun. Sometimes it seems dreadfully far away."

Eustace did not feel quite comfortable or easy as she bent over him, and he took her hands in his.

"We'll think about it," he said.

"And did you have any nice news?" Georgie asked. "Who is it writes to you on green paper?" she laughed in his ear. "Was it Lady Dun, sending you her love and all the rest of it? I believe it was, Eustace; or Veronica? She's engaged to a Spaniard, and he is a fearfully dashing fellow, like a prince, Miss White says. And your nose is out of joint. It's as bad as Finney and myself."

"So mother sent you an account book?" he asked. "Show it to me. What a damn silly present."

"Don't be saying that." She returned to her place and took up a stoutly-bound book with thick clasps. "There y'are, Eustace. Week's expenses, month's expenses, the quarter's ex-

penses, and up to the year! Th' English *are* a queer lot, aren't they now? Always dead set on money."

"Better than being hopelessly in debt," he remarked.

"I'm blest if it is," Georgie retorted. "I'd feel as mean as anything if I entered up all I spent here or there."

"I suppose she thinks you ought to balance your allowance," he said, but his mind had wandered.

Snow was falling quietly outside the big windows, and the stretch of green grass was covered with a deep carpet of white, which threw hard reflections into the room. It deepened the shadows under Georgie's eyes, and made the lines of Clint's mouth look more definite than usual.

"Nell is coming back to us at th' end of the month," Georgie said, referring to a letter beside her plate. "We could manage a week in Ardclare before she comes."

"Possibly," he replied.

"For sure and certain," Georgie laughed at him. "A promise is a promise, and you've as good as agreed. I'll write to Miss White and Dada, and engage rooms at th' hotel."

"You aren't to do that," he said uneasily. "I may have business in London."

"Bother London. Tell your grandmother that, Eustace."

"But I may *have* to go," he replied.

"I never shall like London," Georgie said, shaking her head, "and if you go, I'll have to go."

"Not if you don't want to. There's no reason, Georgie."

"Of course there's reason. I'll go if you must, but we might take it on the way. Oh, Eustace, you don't think I'd be so mean as to stop here, and have you there in some big hotel, away from me."

"I could stay at my club," he said, and he did not look at her. "It bores you, and would only be for a day or two." He got up and walked to the window, watching the snow, with its steady, hypnotic fall.

"Let's leave it over until Nell comes," she said. "Then if you must go, she'n I could be together."

"Very well," he agreed, and he lounged out of the room.

One thing was certain, Clint did not want to go to Ireland. He regarded the prospect with dislike, and the idea of hanging about while Georgie was drawn afresh into the bosom of her old associations, did not appeal to him at all. He wanted freedom, and Georgie's ideas of what marriage entailed were so over-

whelming. She thought it her duty to shadow him, and felt that unless he came with her to Ireland, she was prohibited from going there. Old-fashioned ideas were all very well, but they had their drawbacks, and Clint swore to himself as he once more took out the letter written on green paper and read it again. Nell had warned him with unusual seriousness that Georgie, for all her outward lightness, was at heart a Mrs. Grundy; and he would do well to bear that in mind.

He was in love with her, but was accustomed to variety, and he had lived through a whole year of constant association with his wife. In that year he had come to wish that Georgie was less strictly particular upon some points. She had changed very little, and he had given up his first efforts to make her speak proper English. Her attempts to please him in this respect were a hopeless failure, and now she was becoming a positive care. He wondered at her lack of sense. Any woman ought to know that no man whose bachelor days had been free and easy in quite untrammelled liberty ever settles down completely at once. So far as he was concerned Clint felt that he could invariably return to Georgie with real satisfaction, but he wanted to get free now and then, and once he wanted a thing he usually made it his business to get what he desired. He had an uncomfortable feeling that he could not fool Georgie by telling her an easy lie; and also, if she discovered him in a lie, as Nell said, she would be dangerous.

"Poor Georgie Porgie, she's such a good little soul, Eustace, even though she is really impossible in heaps of ways."

Yet Nell and he were pals, and he had been of use to her more than once, and Eustace reasoned that his sister might come to his assistance over such a harmless little affair as the one he had in his mind. He even persuaded himself that it was harmless, though he very well knew that if it had been, he would not have troubled himself further.

He decided to write, and make time. Circumstances might assist matters, and if Georgie was so mad keen to go to Ireland she could do so without him. So long as the suggestion came from another quarter, this seemed feasible enough. All he need do for the present was to appear to agree with her, and let his plans mature.

Clint felt better once he had arranged things with himself definitely, and he sat down and wrote a long reply to the lady of the green notepaper.

Georgie, too, was writing in her warm, gay room, and telling Dada that he might expect to see her and Eustace in a week or two. "I'm longing to see you all. Tell Kate to make me a sponge-cake, and Miss White to be sure to be on the station when I arrive. Don't be bothered at all about dinner, we can spend the day with you, and have our meals at the hotel. I'm awfully sorry to hear about Finney, but perhaps it is all for the best, if he likes the girl truly. I'd be wild if Eustace and me didn't go to church together. . . ." She stopped and bit her pen. Better not tell Dada that Eustace never went to church at all; but anyhow, he did not go to Mass, which might look even worse in Dada's eyes.

"I'll give Milson the fright of his life, and threaten to tell old Mrs. Rogers that he's taken to racing and card games. Ask him to meet me, Dada darling, for though it is fine to be living in England, I've never once put the old friends out of my heart. I'll go have tea with Mrs. Francis and pull her leg with all the grandeur I'm having over here. Two lords and a countess, as well as several baronets, and baronesses, on the visiting list; won't she be mad when she hears all that? I'd like to have a day with the hounds. Is Garry well, and does Milson have him in good form? If he hasn't I'll make him hop, and will go to the stables myself to see that he gets his fifteen pounds of *white* oats a day. Be sure and tell Milson not to give him *black*, cheap stuff, and not what I'd expect at all. Oh, I'm just wild to think how soon I'll really be back to you, Dada, and I'll play the organ the Sunday I'm in it. I suppose Ardclare is in no way changed, but when I see it myself I'd feel like giving it a big hug. So you see from all this, that though I'm having the time of my life, and it's splendid to have got to England, I have as warm a corner in my heart as ever for Ardclare. Don't be too hard on poor Finney. Perhaps he knows best himself, and religion mayn't matter so much as love, if he loves the girl truly."

Clint came in and asked her if she had any letters, as he was going to walk as far as the post office.

"I've just finished," she said, addressing the envelope in her ill-formed handwriting. "Poor Dada will be as happy as a lark when he reads that."

"As happy as a lark! Rather a dismal lark," Clint commented. "Where did you get your spirits from, Georgie?" he smiled at her, as her face dimpled in response.

"Where did I get them, is it? At a jumble sale."

Clint kissed her and told himself that she was dearer to him than anyone else on earth, and went out into the snowy world, where great lakes of pale blue sky were now making clear ways overhead. The wind was icy but invigorating, and he wondered whether he was not rather a fool to answer the letter which the morning post had brought to him.

CHAPTER XII

A FORTNIGHT passed, and still Clint had not agreed to go to Ireland. He had produced a whole string of reasons why the visit should be postponed, none of which convinced Georgie. She was restless and dissatisfied, and a prolonged frost put hunting out of the question, so that the usual landmarks of the week were obliterated, and time hung heavy, and dragged along on halting steps. Eustace was suffering from an attack of boredom, and with nothing to do proved himself an irritable companion. He began to criticise her again, and Georgie did not accept his comments in any humble spirit. Lady Mayfield descended upon them when things were getting to a stage when they quarrelled about everything, and they both welcomed her with great pleasure.

Nell had plenty to say about most things, and had taken a quick impulsive liking to Georgie, who seemed to her to be the most unique girl she had ever met. She was "impossible" in the sense that she was so astonishingly ignorant of the ordinary ways of life, and her speech was an abiding joy to listen to. Lady Mayfield recognised that Georgie was a sportsman, and an answering chord struck in her shallow heart. She saw her independently of their relationship, but felt that the relationship was the one mistake. Eustace was the last man to embark on anything unusual in the way of a wife. He would not continue to remain charmed, and once the spell broke and the fascination waned, there was likely to be sore trouble ahead for Georgie Porgie.

Upon her arrival at The Gleanings, she realised that there was a rift in the lute, and shook her fluffy head over it sorrowfully. Even though she was fond of Georgie, her allegiance was to her brother, and she thought chiefly of how it affected him. They had always been friends, standing together against Mrs. Clint and playing into each other's hands faithfully.

Nell was an intriguer by nature, and preferred a circuitous path to a straight one. If she had wanted the pepper pot she would have opened fire by talking of pagodas or perambulators.

And with this her surface frankness was tremendous, so that usually no one guessed her secret; but it was known to her brother, and added to his confidence in her. She brought with her a whole collection of stories about her mother, who had been more than usually disagreeable and was now coldly savage towards her daughter-in-law on account of the absence of any hint of grandchildren, but she spared Georgie the repetition of angry comments, and confided them in the ears of Clint.

Seeking him out in his smoking-room, Lady Mayfield perched herself on the fender and looked at Eustace. He was dressed in a rough suit of greenish homespun, and his low collar displayed the fine shape of his throat. His handsome face was rather dull and he was drinking a whisky and soda, though it was early, and altogether it took no special acumen to realise that Eustace was thoroughly out of sorts. To cheer him, she repeated Mrs. Clint's last *mots* about Georgie, feeling that they might fire him into championship of his wife, but he only swore at Mrs. Clint and looked more like a gloomy Greek statue than before.

"It's this Irish business," he said lugubriously. "I don't want to go to Ardclare, Nell, it's damned uncomfortable at the hotel, and then the Duncarrigs haven't asked us there. Anyone could see that it would be infernally awkward for us in the circumstances."

"'Lady Dun' is hostile," she remarked, screwing up her mouth. "Yet I suppose it's natural for Georgie to want to go back. She is devoted to her father, I gather."

"God knows why," Clint replied. "He wanted to get rid of her. Put her up for the highest bidder."

"She is full of illusions," Lady Mayfield laughed. "All very well in theory, but rather hampering to one's actions."

"Well, I don't want to go to Ireland, and she can't let me alone over it."

"Why not let her go alone?" Lady Mayfield asked. "I'll stop on and keep house for you, old boy."

Eustace brightened perceptibly. "I wish to God she would, but she thinks—" he shrugged his shoulders. "She has such hopelessly antiquated notions. Couldn't you give her a hint, Nell?"

Eleanor laughed unrestrainedly. "But I dare not. I'm not equal to it. You'll have to get influenza and a doctor's certificate if you want so much as a room to yourself."

Eustace fiddled with his glass. "And if she went alone she

would be far happier; could play round with all the old lot—*such* a lot, simply beyond description. If I tackle her about it, she goes off in a tantrum, but she might listen to you.” He looked at her steadily with his large bovine eyes, and appeared extremely solemn.

There was silence between them for a few minutes, and then Lady Mayfield spoke, and what she said had no apparent reference to the subject of their conversation. “Did you see Averil?” she remarked casually.

Clint looked down. “Yes,” he said unwillingly, “I did.”

Again there was a little gulf of silence. “Is she coming here?” Eleanor asked, her head tilted a little to one side.

“If I can manage it. There’s no earthly *harm* in it, Nell.”

“No—oh, no,” she replied quickly. “Still, Averil isn’t at all as innocent as Georgie.”

Clint said nothing, but sat looking into the fire.

“It is a bit risky. Averil . . . you know,” his sister went on. “She’s tremendously attractive.”

“Look here, old girl,” Clint got up and put his hand on Eleanor’s shoulder. “I’ll be honest with you, and you know what men are, so I needn’t explain.” He had rather a heavy way of supplying detail, and she nodded at him; already she guessed what was coming. “It’s not that I’m not in love with Georgie.” The explanation had to come, after all; Clint couldn’t proceed without it. “I do love her. I married her without a penny to her name, and I’ve given her everything she wants. She’s made a damn good bargain, if it comes to that, though I don’t want to rub in the money side of it.”

“You never should have married her,” Lady Mayfield said emphatically. “A hopeless error, Eustace.”

“Well, I did, and I don’t regret it,” he said; “but having given her all I have, I never imagined that it meant that I must also lose my entire liberty. That’s what Georgie has done; she’s got me in leading strings, and it won’t answer.”

“I always said so. In fact I told Gee so myself.”

“If I could go and come without this perpetual inquisition we’d be as right as rain,” he went on. “It’s so silly, so damned silly to have a wife who is shocked by this and shocked by that; and, mind you, she had a tearing reputation of her own in Ireland. Hot stuff, and that kind of thing; it jolly nearly scuppered her, but it’s untrue.”

"You do amuse me," Eleanor said. "You and she. I never heard anything so funny."

"I'm not going to explain," Clint said again, "but there it is, Nell; I've made up my mind to have a holiday."

"Who with?" she asked, raising her faint eyebrows. "I always said that a wife ought to be allowed a say in the question of her husband's unofficial friendships. She might even choose them—women are much better judges of one another than men."

"There are plenty of my former friends about still," he said half defiantly. "I'm bored stiff here, and I only want a change, not an earthquake."

"Georgie will create the earthquake if she catches you," Lady Mayfield said, speaking in warning tones. "Can't you compromise? Think it over, Eustace. It's always best to dodge risks. Isn't there an alternative?"

He wandered rather aimlessly round the room, and fidgeted with the papers on his writing-table. "The only girl who interests me is Averil Markham," he said reflectively. "I like her, and there would be no harm in that. If I can't get a little harmless entertainment out of a friendship, I shall do the other thing. I've always been used to liberty."

Lady Mayfield reflected. She was thinking that of the two, were she in Georgie's shoes, she would certainly accept the commonplace alternative. Clint was merely hankering after conditions which were only alluring because they were out of reach. Let him go back to them for a short experience and it would suffice. But how would such an argument affect Georgie? She was strict and, as Lady Mayfield described it, narrow-minded. If she were to discover that Clint had taken a plunge into the lower spheres, she might make no end of a fuss. You couldn't tell what Georgie's principles would dictate, and it was obviously dangerous to play with them. On the other hand, Averil was the least platonic of girls, and she had fallen in love with Clint's Grecian profile. She cared nothing for wives, as a class. Wives simply didn't count with her at all.

Averil was a free-lance, and having cast her eyes upon Eustace, it was unlikely that she would be deterred by any trifles. And yet, if you shut your eyes and kept them shut, refusing to see anything, the situation was workable; it could be camouflaged and no one would be the wiser. Georgie's own innocence closed her in like a wall, and she would be the last to

suspect anything. She had suspected nothing when the whole thing began under her tilted nose, and Averil was an adept at carrying off a situation. Even Eleanor herself had been puzzled, and only the merest chance had "put her wise" as to how matters were tending. Averil would squeeze the last drop of emotion out of the situation, and disappear silently like a snake, leaving no trace of her passing.

In Lady Mayfield's eyes, it appeared better to take the risk of aiding the adventure to which she could be a party. Averil would tell her nothing; she never told anyone anything, and Clint would keep an honourably closed mouth for some years, until, in a fit of confidence, he would at last reveal the story to his sister.

All this was ancient history, for he had done it over and over again. Should she accept the "no harm" theory, she could engineer an opportunity for them to meet, and when it had all burnt out and nothing was left but some stale ashes, Clint would return to Georgie and their present bickering mood would end. He would be remorseful and penitent, and Georgie would never be any the wiser. She looked at her brother, and told herself that one must make these elastic allowances for him. He had been a kind of pasha, and until he married, no one thought any the worse of him for that. To expect him to settle down at once with Georgie was asking a great deal, and those who asked it were likely to be disappointed by results. Georgie had flirted wildly, and Nell thought that she was still capable of flirtation, only that the men she now met were not those she liked. Clint's relaxations were certainly earthly and could be termed sordid; but who was to judge between them? In neither case was it necessary to make a fuss, and though Clint would fuss like fury if he caught Georgie flirting, and Georgie would raise hell if she found that Eustace had been unfaithful, no sensible person would feel that it all mattered very vitally, so long as they were both happy together.

Eleanor's knowledge of life inclined her to the belief that variety was essential to some natures, if not all; whether it were the inspiration of a fresh mind, or the kisses of a passer-by. Life is many-sided, and monotony had to be avoided at as cheap a cost as possible. Nell was temperamentally inclined to play up to Clint. She liked to feel her power over him, and she usually agreed to do what her friends wished her to do. She

hesitated for a time before she spoke, and then she threw discretion away.

"Shall I try and persuade Gee to go to Ireland alone?" she asked. "Don't go rushing off to London, Eustace, it's rather a rotten way, isn't it? You wouldn't really be amused by that kind of thing. What you want is breathing space."

He looked at her gratefully. "That's exactly it," he said; "and, as you say, it's rather a rotten plan, only I'm so fed up with things here, and I'm badly in need of something to buck me up."

"That's agreed then," she said lightly. "I'm sure I can work it. Georgie will come back as cheery as anything, and you'll be happy again. It only needs a little common sense."

"Don't let her think I want her to go," he said anxiously.

"What do you take me for?" she retorted. "Leave it to me."

"You're an awfully good sort, Nell," he said with conviction. They had neither of them referred to Averil and after a little, Lady Mayfield left him alone.

Eustace sighed and stretched himself in his chair. There was nothing to do until Comerforth and his wife and one or two other guests arrived later in the day, and then Georgie would get on her high horse about Comerforth and make a fool of herself. He was becoming permanently anxious about her, and the effect she created on strangers. Two of the men who were invited had not yet met Clint's wife. Comerforth, since Georgie declared war, had a way of drawing her out and making her say the wrong thing. How very often she did say the wrong thing these days, and then her brogue was a little surprising to fresh acquaintances. You might either admire Georgie or laugh at her, and Eustace hated to feel how vulnerable she was, and how her vulnerability affected him. Things which Mrs. Clint had said of her came back to his mind, and he knew that even Nell, with all her width of view, felt Georgie to be at best a rather charming disaster.

She owed him everything: her improved appearance and her added fascination were really his gift. If this were so, surely he might require some small return at her hands? Was it asking a great deal? Of course he loved her, and she was his wife, yet that was not sufficient reason for her to demand that he must change, stock, lock and barrel. She had not changed. She still said "reely" and "gracious," and would ejaculate "My God!" on the smallest provocation. She didn't alter a detail,

merely because he wished her to, and it was little short of preposterous to claim such wide and far-reaching concessions from him.

The day was dark, as the thaw had come, rain was falling out of a sullen grey sky, and the room grew full of dim shadows. At length Clint dropped into a doze and ceased to worry himself about things which could not be helped.

Lady Mayfield flitted through the hall, and, hearing Georgie's voice on an upper landing, went up the wide staircase. She reflected that Georgie really had done well for herself. What hadn't the girl got out of her marriage? Status, comfort, money to spend, and a most generous husband, who was also young and remarkably good looking. He signed cheques with lavishness, for Eustace was temperamentally open-handed. But, after all, when there is plenty of money the act of signing a cheque is not exhausting, in itself. It cost him neither mental nor physical toil; but the impression was that, because he did it willingly, he was in some way unusually noble. Eleanor believed this, and it hardened her heart. Georgie hadn't as much as a five-pound note to her name, and Lady Mayfield inherited some of her mother's attitude towards the poor. If you were poor you were jolly lucky to inveigle a man with plenty to pay your bills, and keep you clothed and fed; but it put you on a lower level if it came to argument, and deprived you of rights which you might otherwise claim. Georgie, in fact, owed everything to Clint. You couldn't escape from it, even if you granted that he had made the bargain himself.

She went upwards with a light step, and found Georgie in difficulties with the housekeeper, who wished her to lecture the under-housemaid. Georgie considered the girl to be in the right, and the controversy grew acrimonious, when Nell caught her by the waist and whirled her into her room. A bright fire burned in the grate and Lady Mayfield's maid was putting away some gorgeously-coloured underclothing in a drawer, but she withdrew at once, and closed the door behind her.

"That Mrs. Maturin is a cat," Georgie said, sitting down in an easy chair. "Horrid old woman. She's very impertinent, too, Nell, and I'm blessed if I'll take cheek."

"I should let her slave-drive," Lady Mayfield replied indifferently. "What does it matter?"

"I won't see the girl bullied. She has as good a right to live as another."

"You don't understand English servants." Lady Mayfield took up a brilliantly coloured garment and regarded it critically. "In Ireland it may be different."

"Ireland," Georgie replied in a voice of longing. "Ireland."

"Poor old wretch, you're homesick. Next to being sea-sick, it's a bad complaint. I've not suffered from it myself, Gee, only I can understand."

Georgie looked out through the window at the bare branches of some tall trees and sighed. "I wish I could get Eustace to come with me. He's terribly obstinate, Nell; over and over I've asked him to come, and not a stir out of him so far."

"You'd like to see your old pa?" Eleanor sat down on the hearthrug. "What a funny little creature you are, Georgie Porgie. Fancy caring for one's father. Mine was a cross old man with a fearfully raffish past. I believe he and the cook had an interesting relationship, but mother declined to know anything about it. The cook was too good to lose, and you couldn't fire out father; we were pleased when he kicked the bucket."

Georgie moved uncomfortably. She did not at all like her sister-in-law's openness of comment upon the dead.

"Well, he was your father," she said. "But Dada"—her whole face lighted up, "Dada's a lamb, and I'm wild to see him. Oh, Nell, wouldn't you try and coax Eustace for me? He thinks a heap of you, and maybe he'd come around."

"I don't see why he should." Eleanor took one of Georgie's hands and began to play with her fingers. "This little pig went to Paris, and this little pig stayed at home. Why the devil, Pie, *should* Eustace drag himself over to Ireland, just to please you? If you were a sensible woman, you'd go alone." Georgie was about to interrupt, and Eleanor put her finger on her lips. "You want to see Dada, and Eustace has no use for Dada."

"Reely——" Georgie broke in.

"Yes, *reely*," Lady Mayfield continued; "no earthly. Also it's a damp climate and the hotel is vile. You don't notice any of these things, and while you are there you will play around. Do be sensible, animal, and if you must go, don't be so frightfully selfish."

"Selfish? Is it me selfish?" Georgie's eyes grew round.

"Yes, *frightfully* selfish. You won't make that little sacrifice for a man who does nothing at all from week to week but kiss you and sign cheques. Listen, Gee, and be advised. Go over

to Ireland, and to make it easy for you, I'll stay here. Now, that's a bargain."

Georgie reflected for a moment. "But husband and wife oughtn't be parted," she said obstinately. "That's what I think."

"Then you think wrong. They get on far better if they are."

"I'd dearly love to go," Georgie remarked after a pause. "And if you were here I'd feel that Eustace was cared. You're sure that it doesn't seem ugly if I leave him for a week?" she sprang to her feet and whirled round, her arms outstretched. "Oh, to be back again, even for a week, Nell."

"Then be sensible, and tell thingummy-jig to pack."

"If Eustace'd let me."

Lady Mayfield laughed. "Here, Pie, I'll take it upon myself to break it to him, and I'll sound the gong in the hall if he agrees. You wait."

"Nell, you are a darling," Georgie followed her to the door, "and I promise I'll not stay a day over the week. Tell him that, and I'll write every evening, and it won't be long. Tell him that. And I'll . . ." but Lady Mayfield had gone and was already out of earshot.

She opened the door of Clint's sanctum, and he awoke with a start.

"I've fixed it," she said. "You had better be rather cross about it, I think, and make a fuss."

"When will she go?"

"This evening. For a week. How'll that do?"

"You are a brick," he said, standing up and smoothing his hair. "I shall have time to go out and send a telegram, what?"

"Better see her first. She expects a row. Never disappoint people unless you must," and Nell went into the hall and sounded a deep note on the gong, while Eustace walked up the staircase and knocked on Georgie's door.

"So you are going?" he said, looking at her unsmilingly.

"Not if you'd rather me stay," she came to him and put her hand on his arm. "I'd never do a thing to put you out, Eustace, you know that, don't you?"

"Oh, it's all right. I'm sure that you'll not be happy until you've seen your father. Tell him that I couldn't come. You can explain it; I don't want his feelings hurt."

She flung her arms around him and pressed her face to his. "You're so good," she said; "far too good to me, Eustace, and I've been selfish, Nell made me see that. I'll only be away the

week, and I'll write each day," she looked at him with wistful eyes.

Eustace kissed her with affection. "You're the best and dearest little wife on earth; tell Mr. Desmond that from me," he said. "And, after all, a week isn't long."

"Not so long, she agreed. "Constance won't be mad because I've cleared off, will she?"

"Nell will make that square."

"Comerforth won't be weeping, anyhow," she added dryly, "and th' other fellows don't know what they've missed; will they now?"

"Not they," he agreed, with a sense of relief; "and now, Georgie, I'd better send a wire, hadn't I?"

"Yes, darling—oh, Eustace, it's bad to be leaving you."

He kissed her again and went away from her, and Georgie once more returned to her packing. Ardclare was the home of her fondest dreams. Marriage was good, but not quite the same fresh, free thing which she had known when Eustace and she used to walk among the fallen leaves along the dear familiar roads. She wanted to walk there again and taste the food of memory. Then there was Dada, and now she could stay at the Rectory and sleep in her old room again. Nothing need be altered since Clint was not coming, and it certainly simplified everything, though she felt that Miss White would not approve.

Already, in spirit, she was with her own once more, and she hailed them with all a wanderer's joy of greeting. It would be such fun, and there had been very little of what Georgie termed "fun" of late. In fact, if you put Eustace out of the reckoning the only real fun she had known was her chance meeting with Lousada.

Again her thoughts turned to Ardclare, and she saw in her imagination the wind-swept road, coming down from the railway station, the brooding mountains, and the colour and light in the sky; English skies held no such colours for her. She recalled the Rectory, the trees along the strip of garden, and lost voices spoke in her ears. Soon she would really be there again, and her gratitude towards Clint, and her shamefaced sense of having behaved selfishly, balanced one against the other in a full heart.

Clint got down to the post office and despatched his two telegrams, one of which contained an urgent invitation.

CHAPTER XIII

GEORGIE was conscious of a queer sense of arrested activity as the train took her south. Her departure from The Gleanings had been touched with unreality, and the stormy crossing was like a bad dream in which she heard familiar accents address her once more in a well-known tongue. The stewardess recognised her and took her under her wing, but even so, Georgie was aware that only part of her travelled in the hot, stuffy cabin, and listened to the hissing sweep of passing waters. She was in truth one with Clint, and the separation cost her a pang. There was a clash going on in her heart, of conflicting emotions, and it destroyed some of her wild anticipation of pleasure. Distance took on a sinister aspect, the week spread out before her unduly long in prospective, and yet she was relieved. If you have been tied to a post, however beautiful the post may be, and are suddenly released, your hands do not at once recover their powers, and Georgie was numbed for the moment. She thought of Eustace and his Grecian profile, how much he would miss her when the dark hours came, and she could not forsake him in her mind, just because she had stepped into the express train and was on her way to Ireland. We all of us suffer more or less from being in two places at once, and Georgie was no exception to the rule.

She had torn up no roots, nor was she emigrating to a new world, but she was a generous young human being, and she felt that if she let herself enjoy the journey, she would be in some way unfaithful to Clint.

She expected a great deal from her visit, more than it could give her, because she was ardent and alive, and gradually, as the well-known outlines of hill and field drew around her, she came close to weeping over the joys of return. It was grand to be travelling first-class, and to be recognised by the guard on the train, who was pleased to see her, and everything looked the same, even the sunset and the shape of the clouds to the west. The great sunlit gap in the clouds reminded her of angels, and a sweep of religious fervour shook her. She was shy on the

subject of religion; it was one of the things which no one spoke about, but she knew that it mattered to her and was close to her heart.

The long rays from the west greeted her like a heavenly benediction as she got into the little branch line train which took her to Ardclare. She was recognised by a dozen county people, and once more she tasted the exquisite delight of being a personage, only a little less important now than Lady Dun herself.

Long before she could see the outlines of the station house at Ardclare, Georgie was half-way out of the window, straining her eyes through the dusk. There were the ghostly-looking gates that cut across the Enniscara Road, the low range of brown hills a mile or so from the village, where the Sunday pack hunted, and last of all the small station buildings and platform with a glimmer of white rails. Her heart was in her throat, she thought, so wildly was it beating, and under a dim oil-lamp she discerned the figures of Mr. Desmond, Miss White and Milson Rogers, with Patsey at a little distance behind them. The voices she knew came to greet her, and in an ecstasy of joy she flung her arms around them all in turn, even Milson, who was a little stiff and awkward, though he gripped her hands hard between his own.

"Oh, glory! But it's fine to see you," she said in a husky voice of intense happiness, and all the way down the road she exchanged greetings with old friends, who ejaculated in great astonishment that Miss Georgie was back, and they were proud to see her again.

"My dear child," Dada repeated, "it is very nice to see you," and Miss White was moved almost to tears.

"Didn't you guess the bad halfpenny would come back?" she said, squeezing her father's arm affectionately. "It's only for a week, Dada, but we'll make the most of it for ourselves. And how's Garry, Milson? If he isn't as fat as a flea I'll have something to say about it."

"He's ready to carry you at the meet on Tuesday," he said in high, cheerful accents. "Is it my saddle you'll want, Georgie, or will th' old side-saddle be good enough?"

"I've never done that," Georgie replied. "Is it to make a show of me that way, Milson? I'm shocked."

She ran down to the kitchen and kissed Kate Love on her wrinkled cheeks, and was told that she had got "very salla around the nose, and wasn't looking a bit nice," by the faithful

retainer, all of which Georgie discounted. She was none; it was far more home to her than The Gleanings had ever been or could be, and the first evening was a rapturous one. When Milson and Miss White went away, Georgie sat by the fire with Dada and told him about England. It was like describing a foreign country, and he seemed to feel that England was a wonderful place, where every one had a motor, and there was no political strife. As he grew older—and he had aged considerably in the year of her absence—he became more and more gloomy about the state of his own country, and Georgie hesitated once or twice, wondering whether her account of England was as satisfactory as she ought to have made it.

"I like th' English well enough," she said, "but they're different to us, Dada, and though I s'pose they're awfully well educated, I don't know, somehow, that they are *reely* any better than we are."

Mr. Desmond seemed to feel that there was something wrong about her attitude, and as he expected to be raided any night on account of an old shot-gun which hung in the hall, but which he would not take down and send to the police barracks, he told her that she knew nothing about Ireland, or what a terrible place it had become. He produced a leaflet asking him to subscribe to a loan, in the name of the Irish Republic, and it annoyed him so acutely that Georgie steered the conversation into more peaceful waters.

"We may be in for a revolution over there any day," she said, hoping to cheer him, "and Eustace doesn't like it. He says th' labouring classes are getting very saucy."

"Ah? Indeed? I'm sorry to hear it," Mr. Desmond replied. "People should all do their duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call them."

"So they should," she agreed. "D'you know, Dada, we have a cross on th' altar in the church at High Cherwell. What would you say to that, now? And vestments! Vestments, *actually*. I thought I was at Mass the first time I went, and nearly cleared meself out. They say Fawther Hawtry hears confessions, and fancy his calling himself 'Fawther.' Isn't that queer? And he a Protestant."

"I hope you go regularly to church," Mr. Desmond said, taking off his pince-nez and laying the offending leaflet on a table at his elbow. "You and your husband."

"Surely," Georgie replied, answering for herself; "but I

don't reely like th' incense, and the choir isn't no great shakes. Will I play th' organ on Sunday, Dada darling, or would Mrs. Francis want to tear me if I did?"

"You shall play," he said, looking pleased, and then he began to talk of Finney and his fall from grace.

But if Georgie was received with something approaching reverence by a section of the former public, she was made to feel that she was still only Georgie Desmond by others. The meet at Ballycard Cross brought her into conflict with the Duncarrigs, and Veronica gave her a frigid bow of recognition, while Lady Duncarrig seemed to seek once more for something just above her head. She enjoyed the run, and rode with all her old skill and dash, and the deepening shadows brought her return, accompanied by Milson Rogers, who had kept with her more or less throughout the day.

"Lady Dun's as out with me as ever," Georgie said with a good-tempered little laugh. "Isn't it the queer thing, Milson, that if you're a dog with a bad name, people'll go on trying to hang you until doomsday? What did I ever do to Lady Dun to make her so cross?"

"Are they nice to you over there?" Rogers nodded vaguely in a northerly direction.

"Yes, indeed. Awfully nice." She paused and thought of The Gleanings and Eustace. "Lady Mayfield, Eustace's sister, is a caution, Milson. The things she says! Glory! If I were to say them there'd be a row, only she *can*, you understand. Got the style, I s'pose. Mrs. Clint is a respectable old lady, and I'm a bit afraid of her, but I don't think she means badly. We just doesn't suit." She gave a quick sigh. "It makes a heap of difference if you've money. Th' English think a lot of that."

"Aye, so," Rogers replied. "I don't think much of th' English Government myself, Georgie, and I say this though I was never a pro-German."

"'Twill be all the same in a hundred years," Georgie replied consolingly. She was not troubled by these matters.

Ardclare discussed her freely. Her clothes were a subject of animated controversy, and Georgie was said to have "gone off." Mrs. Dykes and Mrs. Sharkey decided that it was early days for Georgie to be gallivanting off without her husband, and that it looked bad. They watched Lady Duncarrig's unaltered attitude of disapproval, and agreed that she must know facts unknown to themselves, otherwise Georgie would have at least been asked

to dine at Ardclare, and Miss White was deeply distressed by the omission. Georgie had come back without Clint, and she was already flirting with Milson whom she might well have left alone, as she was provided with a husband, and Milson was a marriageable young man. Trust Georgie to grab any one in trousers at the shortest notice. In fact, more hard things were said of Georgie upon her return than had been said of her before, and though nearly every one called, just to take a look at her, the compliment was not paid in an altogether friendly spirit.

Georgie saw things from another angle. She had changed, and was illogical enough to think that Ardclare had altered. Though she loved every road and field in the place, she felt that it had shrunk and was less impressive than she expected. Cork and the clothes made there by Madame Murphy were no longer glittering with incredible beauties, and Georgie complained that the trains were slow and that you could not really shop in Patrick Street, which did more to create animosity than anything else she said.

"Georgie's getting too big for her breeches," Mrs. Dykes remarked with a sardonic laugh. "Cork isn't good enough for her any longer, and don't I well remember when all the ball dresses she ever had came out of Nannie Heffernan's little room over the post office. Airs and graces are the order of the day, my dear."

Georgie's own little bedroom appeared small and ill-furnished, and Dada dwelt upon his troubles with great concentration, so that she was forced to sit and offer remarks of sympathy, though her heart was no longer in tune.

She was happy, and in her daily letter to Clint she told him so, but she missed him desperately, and when she lay in her small bed at night she sent her longing to him across the darkness. He wrote her one letter, telling her that Comerforth and his wife were at The Gleanings, and the two men he had expected. They were hunting again, and the frost had broken. It was a short letter, and after that he sent her a telegram every day instead of writing, and as the week went on he added to his hope that she was well, that she must not hurry back if she wanted longer leave from home.

"Isn't it like the kind heart of him?" she said to Dada. "Always thinking of me, and he's mad for me to be back."

"You've been here for a nice visit," Mr. Desmond replied, looking down. "Perhaps you should return to Eustace."

Georgie looked at him in momentary dismay. Did Dada really not *want* to keep her longer? Such a thought was incredible. She had brought noise and movement back to the Rectory, and filled the house with people once more. Dada had grown used to quiet. She put the thought from her and smiled at him. "I'll take another two days," she said. "And I have a grand idea, Dada; I'll go back a day sooner than I'm expected, just for the fun of seeing how pleased Eustace'll be over it."

It was wonderful to sit at the wheezy old organ again and sing "Shall we gather at the river?" at the top of her voice, the whole congregation following her like a straggling pack of hounds, and to hear one of Dada's sermons, which, directly he gave out the text, she welcomed as an old and tried friend. She sat on a chair in a corner facing the church during the sermon, and could see every one she knew. Duncarrig trying to keep awake, Lady Dun looking like royalty and desperately bored; Milson with his eyes furtively straying to Georgie's own corner, and all the others whom she knew so well. Yet she could not go back to it again. With her hands clasped in her muff, she sat there, and knew that there is no such thing in life as return. We cannot return, for we ourselves are changed. Love them all as she did; feel as she did that there was passion akin to pain in looking back from where she stood, she admitted that her real place was lost.

She spent the afternoon with Miss White, who talked of Finney's engagement, and Lady Duncarrig, until Georgie's mind was rocked like an infant in a cradle, and she wondered whether the Sundays had formerly been so long as all that, and why it was that things which mattered in Ireland did not seem to be of much importance elsewhere. To enliven Miss White, she described Lady Mayfield's conversation, and had the satisfaction of shocking her good friend.

"But, Georgie, a lady of title *could* not speak like that."

"Indeed she does," Georgie replied, "and I've spared you the best of it. Nell hates her mother, and says so."

Miss White shook her head. These modern ways were beyond her.

"I'm so glad she accepts you properly," she said in her dignified way. "Perhaps she was not well brought up. People of good family often run wild."

"I don't know about her bringing up," Georgie reflected. "Still, I'm very fond of her. I'm sure there's no harm in her, and that the most of it is talk."

"I hope you won't get into a fast way of talking. Your father would be so distressed," Miss White said earnestly.

"No fear at all," Georgie replied unhesitatingly. "Only over in England you have to be fearfully careful. They don't understand fun, and if you want a bit of fun they think you're fast."

"Captain Clint would be very particular, I am sure."

"Eustace? He's as jealous!" Georgie giggled. "You should see the look he gives me if he thinks I'm getting on too well with one of his friends."

At last it all came to an end, and Georgie sat with Mr. Desmond through the final evening of her visit. She was elated by the harmless little joke she intended to play on Clint, and was happier than she had been since the evening of her return. For there was something of the puppy in Georgie, and, like an eager puppy, she barked and jumped and wagged ecstatically at the prospect of going out, and repeated all the same appropriate gestures on the sign of turning home again. She could enjoy anything now, because she was so soon to feel Clint's arms around her, and to know from him that he had missed her, even though he did not write.

His telegrams made up for any lack of letters, for it still seemed such a lovely and expensive way of expressing your interest in the absent. England had become more attractive again, and The Gleanings was wonderfully comfortable if you compared it to the Rectory. Local to the core of her, in a sense, Georgie was still aware that in Ardclare there was a shade too much of parish politics and an unnecessary amount of personal acrimony. People suspected one another, and they fought about trifles. Only a day before Mr. Madden had walked out of the choir because Mrs. Dykes asked him to sing up to time, and now the story of the battle was going the rounds, and Mr. Madden was said to be "kicking the stars" in his wrath. Why was it these things mattered? Georgie was expected to cut poor Finney, and had fallen under her father's displeasure because she had crossed the road to speak to the young man.

"I declare, Mrs. Clint, I'm so used to cuts that I'm surprised to have a civil word," he said. "And aren't we all Christians, Mrs. Clint, and I'm not turning heathen, am I?"

It was exhausting and puzzling to Georgie, and she felt that there was something to be said for the pagan English. They didn't care; so you got away from narrow judgment. She was regretful to leave Ardclare, and yet she already pictured the return. None of the servants would kiss her, or tell her that she was looking a show in them new clothes, or comment upon her personal appearance. The old woman who kept the gate lodge would not embarrass her by asking intimate questions as to the state of her health. Nell would raise her voice to a hard scream and call her "Woman" or "Female," and make a few racy remarks about Clint; but Georgie looked forward to seeing her again. It would be like emerging from a rainbow fog through which queer little draughts found their way into a bright, sharp atmosphere, devoid of illusion.

"It's been lovely being home again, Dada darling," she said, leaning her head against his thin, black knees. "And next time I come I'll bring Eustace."

"Ah, yes," Mr. Desmond replied dreamily, "and stay at the hotel in Cork."

"That's an idea," she said, watching the sparks fly up the chimney. She felt that the "Imperial" was a splendid establishment, and the suggestion showed a good deal of cleverness on the part of Dada.

"I wonder you were not invited to Ardclare," he remarked after a perceptible pause.

"I was only in it a week, and perhaps they were full up." Georgie unconsciously adopted her old habit of sheltering Mr. Desmond from the blasts of adversity. "Anyhow, I wasn't favourite there at any time."

"You have married well," Mr. Desmond said argumentatively, "you have a fine place in England, and in every way you are their equal. What do they mean by it?"

"I expect it's Miss Stuart. She wanted Eustace, and I got him. She's engaged now, but that hasn't made her like me any the better. Never mind them, Dada; they're a silly old lot. Let them alone."

"Mrs. Dykes mentioned it," he said, still ruffled and angry.

"She would." Georgie shrugged her shoulders. "It's the very thing I'd expect out of her. If there's a hole in the toe of your stocking she'll find it out."

And the rest of the evening slipped by as they laboured the point. Lady Duncarrig had made a spiritual entry into the

small drawing-room, and forced herself into the discussion. What they might otherwise have talked of it is hard to say. Mr. Desmond had an impenetrable reserve towards every one, and Georgie was no exception. Now and then his reputation for "not noticing" trembled almost to its fall, but by some queer sleight of hand he invariably saved it at the last minute. To Georgie he was intensely pathetic in his lonely dignity, like a god who has been forgotten of his worshippers, and she grew wild to think that some of the congregation dared to criticise him. She adored him, and felt him to be the best and most saintly of men, and she also believed that he was worked to death, because he frequently told her so, and said he expected "to drop in the harness."

He spoke in a tired voice, and was more easily worked up into bursts of temper against the world in general, and some of his congregation in particular, than of old, and Georgie felt that all this arose from the fact that she was not present to "care him." Mrs. Dykes was like a cat-fish, and as she played the organ she had opportunities to go frequently in pursuit of Dada, and say unkind things to him. He was very angry indeed about Joe Madden leaving the choir, and there was talk of a public apology, though who intended to apologise was not at all clear.

"I suppose in England there is none of this trouble," he said, when they had completed the circle once again.

"Not that *sort* of trouble," Georgie replied with the air of a seasoned explorer, "but other sorts, Dada. You'd be wild if you knew how lax they are about evening church."

"Dear me. The world is growing very bad, very bad," Mr. Desmond said, and, taking out his prayer-book, he began to read evening prayers.

Georgie knelt with her toes against the fender, just as she had done in former years, and the cushions of the chair smelt doggy, because Atalanta the terrier had used it as a bed. She knew the number of buttons missing in the upholstery, for she used to count them of old. Once again her eyes dwelt fondly upon the shabby surroundings, and a pang caught her heart, because she was to leave it in the morning and go back to pleasures and palaces.

"From anger, hatred and malice and all uncharitableness," Mr. Desmond read with a touch of temper in his voice, as though he had an individual case in mind.

"That's Mrs. Dykes," Georgie said to herself, and murmured, "Good Lord, deliver us."

"From all false doctrine, heresy and schism."

"One for poor Finney," Georgie thought regretfully. What a difficult world people made it all for one another.

She rose from her knees, and Mr. Desmond began to put out the lights, and Georgie turned back the hearthrug. At that moment she loved her home desperately, and had no words in which to express her feelings when she kissed Dada above his whiskers and said good night.

They saw her off, Miss White, Milson and Dada, and she again leaned out of the carriage window and waved until the station platform was utterly out of sight. There was a clear sky overhead, and the country was blazing with yellow gorse in wild, exuberant flower, so that it looked as though the hedges and banks were outlined in gold. Great shadows floated across the mountains, and Georgie thrilled with pride in the sight of it all.

A telegram arrived for Mrs. Clint after she had left, and Dada opened it nervously, for he had never become used to telegrams, and connected them with sudden death. But it was only to tell Georgie to remain at Ardclare another week, and Clint would arrange to come over and bring her back himself. Mr. Desmond read it with a sigh of relief, and put it into the waste-paper basket.

CHAPTER XIV

LADY MAYFIELD was sitting in a chair in front of the fire in the drawing-room of The Gleanings, staring at a Dresden china shepherdess, who smiled coyly at her from the mantelpiece. Her bright cheeks were more than usually red, and her mouth moved a little because she could not keep it still; she was smiling a forced smile, and going over the details of her meeting with Georgie, hoping that she had given nothing away by her manner.

Georgie's unexpected return had made her extremely uneasy in mind, and she covered her dismay with talk. In fact, she knew that she had overdone the vehemence of her welcome, and fallen into Clint's habit of explaining everything far too carefully. Averil's presence in the house, and the fact that she and Eustace were out together, should only have been touched upon, and instead, with a violently thumping heart, Eleanor had dwelt heavily on the very point she should have avoided.

After the first rush of enthusiasm Georgie had gone to her room. She was disappointed because Clint was absent, and ruffled when she heard that Averil was staying in the house. She asked when she had come, and Nell bungled over the date, while Georgie seemed irritated because no one had told her. There was a natural antipathy in her feelings towards Averil, and the idea of her being at The Gleanings robbed her glad return of half its joy.

During Georgie's absence events had been by no means stationary, and Eleanor herself had dispatched the telegram, saying that Eustace would go to Ireland and bring her home, in the hope that it would give things time to settle. She knew from her own experience that it is nearly impossible to keep facts from pervading the atmosphere. Hidden motives betrayed themselves and secrets whispered their story into the silent air; unless they were careful, Georgie would guess.

Lady Mayfield had aided and abetted her brother in his sudden infatuation for Averil, partly because she thought it would soon fizzle out and the less it was repressed the sooner it would

all be over, and partly because she had a natural love of doing what she had better have left alone. In all the varied conditions of life Nell played false, and she was prepared to treat a friend she had finished with or a lover she had tired of in exactly the same way.

She knew that Clint was stampeding the situation, though he only wanted Averil for the moment. Behind that, he seemed to even love Georgie quite deeply, and would return to her in due time. Neither he nor his sister ever really knew what they wanted, but were swept hither and thither by impulse, and the situation was like an attack of measles which would pass, leaving the subject normal again. They were both emotional and oversexed, but Georgie could not be expected to understand this.

Now Georgie with her ridiculous habit of taking everything for granted, had upset all their plans by coming home, and neither Eustace nor Averil were in the least prepared for her return.

Lady Mayfield lacked the asset of moral courage, nor had she immoral courage when it came to the point; her heart felt several sizes too large, and she smiled the same wooden smile and rehearsed the meeting once more. She was sure that she had screamed too much. Her voice always ran up the scale when she became excited. She sat there, pretty, elegant and extremely unhappy, wishing that Georgie's boat had foundered on the journey and that she had been drowned.

It is uncomfortable to feel like a conspirator who has left some damning clue lying about, and Eleanor wondered if Clint had been careful. Georgie was splendidly innocent, and an innocent person is always easy to dupe, but then, again, there was the fact that if her suspicions were awakened she would bristle all over with principles. A hot rush of alarm swept over her, and she began to feel that it had all been risky and stupid. One of the servants might drop a hint; she never could tell, for the housemaid seemed to like Georgie, who had a way of getting upon quite friendly terms with these people. Another black mark against Georgie's name, but one which underlined the further possibility of danger.

From her own point of view, Lady Mayfield regarded any act as harmless, provided no one was worried by it. Averil and Clint understood the rules of the game, which included no "for evers" or "world without end"; they were merely indulg-

ing in a rather compromising affair which meant nothing, if only you understood. So long as Georgie did not guess . . . she rubbed her hands together for they were ice-cold, and wished that Clint would come back. It was wretched to be the only person in the house to face Georgie if she came down in a raging temper. She had tried to review the situation from the point of view of one whose conscience is clear, but the attempt was not very successful.

Georgie was taking an interminable time to change and come downstairs. What was she doing up there? The gong had sounded twenty minutes ago. Where was the housemaid? Lady Mayfield's distrust of the girl intensified.

The clock ticked on steadily, and the flower-scented room looked gay and comfortable in the mingled light of dancing flames and the cold brightness of the day beyond the windows, and at last Nell walked with assumed nonchalance to the drawing-room door and told the parlour-maid who was crossing the hall to remind Mrs. Clint of the time.

Once again she returned to the fire and bent towards it, warming her hands. If only Clint and Averil would return and create a diversion. After all, if there were trouble it was of their making, and they ought to be there to stand the racket. She listened with strained ears for the return of the parlour-maid, who came after a long pause and told Lady Mayfield that Mrs. Clint would be down presently.

"She isn't ill, is she, Redway?" Eleanor asked.

"No, my lady, I don't think so. The door was locked."

"Was Ada there?"

"Ada was unpacking, I think. Madam rang for her some time ago."

Lady Mayfield turned once more to the fire, and began to review past occasions when she had encountered difficult situations quite successfully. She had been surprised and even pleased by her own lack of conscience, and admired it in herself. This, after all, was Clint's affair, and if Georgie had listened to servants' gossip she stood utterly condemned by that alone. An hour had passed since the gong had sounded, and at last she heard footsteps crossing the hall and coming towards the door. She fought down the uneasiness of her mind and began to talk before Georgie came across the threshold of the room.

"Georgie Porgie, you must be as beautiful as the Queen of Sheba by this time. Aren't you famished?"

Georgie made no reply; she stood in the door for a moment, and then came in, closing it behind her. Her face was very white and she stared in front of her vacantly, in the attitude of one who finds herself in a strange land. She looked sullen, Lady Mayfield thought, and inwardly she prepared herself for war. There was no doubt about it, however she had come by her information, Georgie *knew*.

"What's the matter?" Eleanor asked sharply, and Georgie looked at her as though she heard her speaking through a cloud.

"I s'pose you know," she said dully.

"Know? Know what?" Lady Mayfield got up and stood before her sister-in-law. She felt again that Georgie was only a penniless nobody, which certainly was a disqualification that nothing would ever redeem, but she tried to appear good-humoured and half careless.

"About the two of them," Georgie replied. "I know what Eustace has done."

"What are you talking of? I simply don't understand you."

"I've found out." There was an angry intentness in Georgie's voice.

"But what? For goodness' sake, Pie, don't be melodramatic; it's so stupid, and besides, it's always bad form."

Georgie shrugged her shoulders. "I tell you I know. Him and Miss Markham."

Lady Mayfield threw out her hands with a quick gesture.

"Oh, that? Well, if that's all——" but her cheerful tones died out as she met Georgie's look, and again she became angry. "The servants have been talking, I suppose? Reely, Gee, you *must* learn that one doesn't discuss one's people with the housemaid; if Eustace knew it he would be savage, and I certainly should not blame him."

"I found out for myself," Georgie said, looking away through the window to where the cold sunlight touched the branches of wind-swayed trees. "They didn't mean me to know, of course, but that's no use now."

Lady Mayfield changed her tactics, and she put her arm round Georgie's shoulder. "Don't jump to conclusions," she said. "Averil is only a girl, and it's rather a serious charge to make against her. Personally, I don't believe a word of it, Georgie."

Anyhow, you must tackle Eustace. If you have any *real* proof, you should tell him what it is."

"I think you've been helping them," Georgie said in the same dull voice. "They're off together, isn't it?"

"Yes, why not? Eustace took Averil out in the car."

"We'd best have lunch," Georgie remarked, with a sudden return to the demands of life. "I'm sorry I was late, but I had to think for a time."

She wrapped herself about in a cloak of reserve, and they went into the dining-room together. All she could do was to keep her features composed and drive off the sick longing to burst into helpless tears.

It seemed years since she had arrived at The Gleanings, and her parched eyelids burnt like fire. If only one could lie down and go to sleep and then wake up and say it was a dream; but it was no dream, and there was worse, infinitely worse, to come.

The meal went through in silence, except for an animated conversation which Lady Mayfield held with her dog; she addressed him enthusiastically and fed him from her own plate. Once or twice she spoke to Georgie about a natural reaction after a bad crossing, and said she should have stayed in bed, and on the whole really did her best to keep up appearances before the servants. They were not deceived, nor did Lady Mayfield expect them to be, but she had upheld the conventions. What she really feared was the return of her brother. Eustace would be unprepared for either Georgie or Georgie's unfortunate discovery, and also he was not in the least likely to be in a mood to propitiate her. If she made a fuss when they arrived, the situation would be in the cart. Then it was no use telling Georgie that Eustace always had and always would get these attacks, or that she herself had been one of them, and that they passed. If she was sensible she would ignore the whole thing, and wait until later to make Eustace suffer for his sins.

"Georgie Porgie," she said as they went back to the drawing-room, "can't you be forgiving? I'm sure Eustace hasn't gone *very* far, even if he was rather foolish. But you must take us as we are, and we aren't Puritans. Did you never do anything you were sorry for afterwards?"

Georgie slid away from Eleanor's arm. "Yes, but nothing reely bad. There's some things it's a shame to do."

"Couldn't you use tact?"

"I know what I'm going to do."

"Don't be foolish," Eleanor spoke earnestly; "they may be back any minute, and I beg of you to let nothing out while Averil is in the room. You don't know her as I do, and if I tried to tell you you wouldn't understand."

Georgie looked at her again and clasped her hands with a desperate movement. She took no heed of what Eleanor had to say, because her heart was murdered and dying within her, and she still had to fight hard to keep away tears. She had stumbled full upon realisation, and it overwhelmed her like a surging sea; her eyes had been blinded by the bitterest tears she had ever known; loss and disillusionment grasped her life and tore it into shreds, so that Nell's talk was unmeaning and even impertinent, for the sacredness of sorrow was unknown to Lady Mayfield. Georgie could not heed her warnings because she was preoccupied with her dreadful knowledge. The pain of discovery was physical as well as mental, and Georgie's head ached and ached and she knew that she felt sick to death. There was a curious quality of remoteness in everything; Lady Mayfield, who kept on talking, seemed incredibly distant, at the far side of the hearthrug, and Georgie was alarmed at her own isolation. She felt that the pictures and the photographs and all the furniture had a malicious look, and that the whole house cried out to her that she was a fool and had been betrayed; but betrayal was merely a commonplace affair of ordinary social intercourse, and the longing grew upon her to run out of the door into the world—anywhere, so that she never come back again. But before she could do this she must see Eustace.

How Nell talked! Was there not any end to what she had to say, and how her voice pierced into the pain of an aching head. She was advising, consoling and warning Georgie; dragging out world-stained episodes from her own past, and grouping dozens of people upon her side, all of them smirched and tarnished, but none of them minded about it; and still the monologue went on, and Georgie was only aware that her former centre of gravity had been destroyed, and that she was dizzy and could not see.

At last the break came, and the sound of voices outside the long window informed both women that Eustace and Averil had returned.

"Remember all I have said." Lady Mayfield leaned over Georgie and spoke with frantic emphasis, as the handle of the door turned and a gush of fresh wind blew in.

Georgie stood up, and the voices outside still spoke. Eustace was laughing, and he had his hands on Averil's shoulders as he pushed her into the room before him. She was wearing her leather coat and a close little hat, and her face was flushed by the weather. She seemed very happy, and flashed a look at him as he stared, his own eagerness dropping from him in a moment.

"Georgie!" he said, coming forward to where she stood. "By Jove, this is a surprise!"

"Took a bit of a rise out of you?" she asked slowly, her eyes travelling to where Averil stood unconcernedly.

There was a moment's silence, and Eustace looked at Lady Mayfield, who made telegraphic signs with her eyebrows.

"Averil is here," he said, and he pushed the remark at Georgie, touching her with his hands. She could see that he was trying to think of something natural to say, and he was angry. She knew him so well, she knew when he raged inwardly at her *gaucherie*, and blamed her for making mistakes.

"I see that," she said, rousing herself.

"Then why don't you—? Why, what's wrong, old girl?" he laughed awkwardly. All spontaneity had left them for ever as they stood there, and though Clint did his best to recapture it, it was far beyond the horizon of all their thoughts.

"It's not for *me* to tell *you*," she said, drawing away from his hands. "Once I loved you, Eustace, I did reely, but that's done and finished with, and I don't care now."

"Georgie had a vile crossing," Lady Mayfield broke in, snatching at Averil, and taking her forcibly to the door. "Poor old Gee, she's upset. Make her go to bed, Eustace; it's the only place when one feels like that."

Averil's only contribution to the situation was a laugh, and as it reached the dark recesses where Georgie stood it seemed to awaken her once more to her agony.

When they were alone Clint sat down and watched his wife with his wide blue eyes. He was furious with her, and she had affronted Averil, just when Averil meant a great deal to him, and he had a throbbing sense of possessorship towards her. Also, Averil had made him feel that his marriage was such a young fool's mistake. She hadn't actually discussed Georgie

with him, but the contempt she felt for her had affected him, and he knew that Georgie was her inferior. It withered his love, and he saw her through hard, critical eyes.

"Are you going to explain?" he asked, forgetting that Georgie had not his own love of intricate explanation.

"You've acted very badly," she said, looking away from him. "That is for your own conscience, I s'pose. Anyhow, if it was you that led her astray you'll be punished. If she was wicked before she met you, it doesn't make so much difference to me, because I'm finished with you."

Clint flushed hotly; this was plain speech with a vengeance. His dignity as a man of honour, as well as that of a man of the world, suffered a shock, and he made an exclamation of disgust. If she imagined that she could talk to him like this, he must make it quite clear that she could not.

"I don't know what you are driving at," he said. "You appear to be accusing some one? Me or Miss Markham?"

"I'll say as little as I can," the words dragged themselves out. "It's not to quarrel with you, Eustace, but, my God! When I think of how I used to believe in you. Set you above all the world; you're reely not a man at all. Why, poor Finney wouldn't stoop to what you've done, and Milson would call it shameful." Her face flamed, for as she looked again at Clint the thing became more clear to her. He was utterly spoiled for her, and his power to charm was gone.

From Clint's point of view the situation was becoming very awkward. Georgie spoke as one who had full knowledge, and if she had it was no use trying to bluff. He did not yet take in the whole meaning of the circumstances in which he found himself, but counted upon his own influence over her to stay the tempest.

"I'm damn' sorry, Gee," he said awkwardly. She might be touched by honesty of speech. "I know I let myself go a bit too far. Be a sportsman, and forgive me this once."

He ought to have got up and thrown his arms around her and kissed her, but he did not really want her kisses, and, as he sat where he was, her stony demeanour worked up wrath in his heart. It unnerved him, because she ought to be crying—why the devil did she not cry? There was nothing but silence everywhere, and he wondered how he was going to get out of the room. Georgie's silence was full of angry intentness. She was wondering why she had ever loved him, or if she ever had,

for just then he was in her eyes most despicable. She told herself that she must not burst into tears. Time enough for crying later on, when this was over.

"It's no good," she said dryly. "I'm not the sort that gives in over things. What you've done is what I won't never pardon."

He got up at last, and she seemed to be looking sorrowfully at him, so that his spirits rose and he advanced to her with a gay smile. "Come along, then," he said. "We're all human, aren't we, Georgie?" His self-esteem rose up in revolt as she drew back with a sick look of disgust in her eyes. "Come, Gee, just a kiss, and then you may go for me as much as you like." He stood and upbraided her. "Haven't I done everything I could to make you happy and comfortable?" He thought of his cheque-book, and how she had nothing of her own; there is no sin so grave, after all, as that of poverty, and Georgie was his dependent, even when he humoured her and pleaded and asked her forgiveness.

"I don't want nothing done for me," she said wearily. "As for money, I'd not take it."

"I wasn't speaking of money," he said, with a renewal of his attitude of affront. "You speak as if you hate me. Why should you? I've never done you any harm. All this," he waved his hand vaguely, "is nothing. You exaggerate things. I love you better than anyone else, and I'll do anything to please you—anything."

It seemed as though Georgie had not heard him, but her heart was sore at his words. He had made a poor fight of it, and she knew he was trying to trick her again, that everything he said was a lie. She must be placated. Nell had been just the same; the same motive inspired both brother and sister. Yet she could not look at his pleading blue eyes, because she feared that he might seem helpless and so break her resolve, when he was only a sham.

"Think what your own father would say, if we had any kind of break," he urged. "Do show some consideration for his feelings."

"Dada'd die if he knew," she said tragically. "But it is no use. You're no more to me than the mud of the roads, and it would be awful to pretend. I can't go back on myself, Eustace, and that's the whole of what I have to say."

She passed him, holding herself erect and giving him a long

reproachful look as she left the room, while Clint stood by the fireplace, his eyes on the coals. Women always made such an intolerable fuss about these things, but they came round, and Georgie would come round when she was rested, and a little used to the idea. He was still consoling himself with this thought when Lady Mayfield joined him, looking pinched and fagged.

"Well?" she asked, putting her hand on his arm.

"How did she find out?" he inquired savagely.

"I don't know. Talked to the housemaid probably. One can't always be sure of what Gee will do. Did you smooth her down?"

"No," he said shortly.

"Then you'll have to. And Averil is in a tantrum. She merely lies and sticks to it, and wants an apology from Georgie. She says her people will——"

"Good Lord!" Clint stretched himself and yawned. The fire which had consumed him was dying out, and he felt that women were indeed the bane of a man's life.

"Go up to Georgie and talk sense to her," he commanded. "I'll settle Averil myself. It'll be all right."

"Talk sense! I've been talking sense for hours upon hours," Nell said with a scream of reproach. "But I'll do my best for you, old thing."

"It will be all right," Clint said again, as he walked from the room. After all, he had managed women all his life and relied upon his natural powers of persuasion.

Lady Mayfield lighted a cigarette and began to ponder over a new line of argument. Georgie was married, and had taken Eustace for better or worse; it was her duty to recall him to a sense of responsibility. The law was on Georgie's side, and legally she had every right known to woman. Eleanor felt that this was a good point to make, and one which might appeal to her sister-in-law's stern view of duty. She did not want to clasp Eustace to her breast, but she must because, legally, she alone had the right to do so. As a Christian she must forgive, and as a wife she must clasp furiously. Lady Mayfield had just finished an argument carried on in her mind, in which she conquered Georgie's scruples, when she wandered to the window of the room that looked out over the drive, and the sight that met her eyes banished all else from her mind.

Georgie was walking rapidly away from the house, carrying a handbag, and there was something dreadfully final in the

dark little silhouette travelling away so determinedly from the big house.

On the impulse of the moment she ran to the smoking-room and opened the door. Clint and Averil were standing close together, and Nell was conscious that she had interrupted a reconciliation, but she did not care.

"Georgie has gone!" she said. "What are we to do?"

Clint frowned; he felt that there ought to be a limit as to what amount of melodrama a man can be asked to endure within a few short hours. "I expect she has gone out. She looked seedy," he said. "It may do her head good."

"She was carrying a bag," Eleanor replied. "Why should she, if she only went out for a walk?"

But neither of them seemed to take any notice, and Lady Mayfield left them and went up to Georgie's room.

A little later she came down, holding a letter in her hand, and called to Clint to come to her.

"I've read it," she said in a stupid voice. "It's for you."

Clint walked to the window, and his eyes travelled over the badly-written lines.

"I'm going, and shall not come back. One thing I pray of you, Eustace—don't let Dada know. I can explain so as he won't guess that there's a break between you and me. All the presents you gave me are together, and I have what Aunt Jane sent me, so that if you were to be worrying about me not having any money, you need not do so. Please just leave me alone. I know that we are married, and that to the end we may never change that, but after what has been it's not possible for me to live as your wife with you.

"GEORGIE."

Eustace folded up the letter and put it in his pocket.

"It's about the best thing she could have done," he said, "she will be back in a week, and everything all right. Don't worry, Nell; the most she can have is about twenty pounds. God! What fools some women are."

"But you *must* bring her back," Lady Mayfield said frantically, "she is practically friendless. And she isn't going to Ireland?"

"No, not to Ireland. I'm sure it's all right. She hates

London, she'll be frightened there and be jolly glad to come home."

"Eustace!" Eleanor's voice was charged with reproach. "You don't know Georgie. She won't come back; she'd starve first."

"Not she," he said. He was recalling Georgie's look and the open disgust of her eyes. She had elected to accept a very real punishment for herself, and he did not regret it. He had supplicated, apologised and implored, and in return she stood above him. Now she might, in her turn, sue him for favours, and he would pardon her in due time. She had shattered his dignity for an hour, and without any exertion on his part, she was insane enough to pass sentence upon herself; there would be a pleasant sense of equality when she returned again. So he patted Eleanor on the shoulder and consoled her.

"Make up some story that will do for the servants or anyone who asks," he said. "It may only be twenty-four hours. She's a good little sort, Nell, and I'm damned fond of her. Let her have a flutter and she'll recover twice as fast."

But Eleanor was not mollified, she had stood a great deal that day and she broke into tears and reproaches.

"I think you are utterly selfish," she said, "you and Averil; you've both of you treated Georgie shamefully; but to let her go like this . . ." and she lay on the sofa shaken with a hysterical tempest of sobbing.

CHAPTER XV

GEORGIE'S arrival in London coincided with a week of dense fog, and to follow the course of her wanderings during the time that her little store dwindled away, would be to repeat a litany not unlike that of the Buddhist Hypongy, which consists of a dreary iteration of the words, "Sorrow, misery and despair." Those who have known loneliness, discomfort and fear, or who have suffered from sudden and complete disillusion, know the heaviness of even the boldest heart, in a sharp encounter with reality.

She was entirely friendless and without any adviser, and the squalid little room she rented at an exorbitant sum, offered her nothing but a shelter from the weather. The dark house where she lived seemed symbolic of evil, it was so dirty, and her fellow lodgers looked at one another with hostile eyes.

Her life at The Gleanings had unfitted her for discomfort and penury, and there was a cold feeling at her heart which she could not conquer. Never before had she been alone. In Ardclare, people dropped in at all hours of the day and were sociably inclined, and at The Gleanings there were often guests in the house, as well as callers. She had moved in small genial circles, and now, quite suddenly, she was cast entirely upon her own resources. At last Georgie was actually up against it, and knew that she was nothing but an infinitesimally small person, lost in a wide sea.

She decided to call herself Miss Desmond once more, and put away her wedding ring, but it really all mattered very little. Her landlady, Mrs. Bank, a pale, overworked woman, who lived in the basement in the dark, like a mushroom, took no heed of her and accepted her carefully-prepared story with complete indifference, once she paid her rent in advance. No one cared. She might live or die, feast or starve, and they were all equally unmoved towards her fate.

One thing Georgie had grasped, and that was that Mrs. Bank did not seem to think her a lady, and asked her whether she was working in a shop. She gave a noncommittal answer, and sat

brooding in her ugly, wretched little room, wondering whether it might not be best to try and get employment of that kind. She had no references to give, and expected that it might be difficult to obtain work without, yet at first this did not daunt her, and she began her weary struggle a day or two after she left *The Gleanings*.

Very soon, Georgie experienced the growing pains of realisation. The big shops where she went to make her first attempt overawed her, and she sought interviews with hard-looking, well dressed women, who treated her with scant politeness. They looked down upon her, and their scorn was unmitigated, so that she fell from her first standard and tried, with ever-lessening hope, at small tobacconists and dingy little drapers' shops in mean streets. But wherever she went the results were the same, though the manner of refusal was different, and at the end of a fortnight she was already starving herself, and counting the notes in her bag with feverish anxiety.

No one wanted an untrained girl, who knew nothing about bookkeeping. The posts which could be taken by people without training were given to relatives or friends, and there was something about Georgie which proclaimed the fact that she was different to those, and they decided against her. Her clothes looked too good, and her round, impertinent little face suggested gaiety. You couldn't believe that she was really honest but poor, and she had no recommendations.

"Go back to your mother," one kindly woman said to her, when she had bought a reel of cotton and asked if they wanted a saleswoman, or some one to help.

"Indeed I'd be glad," Georgie said, her eyes filling with tears. "And the churchyard would be my address."

The woman was sorry for her, but she could do nothing.

It was not very easy to write cheerful letters to Dada, but somehow it was done. The streets frightened her, and once or twice when she had wandered about alone at a late hour, men had spoken to her, and one man, who was very drunk, caught her by the arm and tried to drag her into a public-house.

Behind all the sordid anxiety of her days, Georgie had a numb pain at her heart. She had loved Eustace with great sincerity, and he had betrayed her and been unfaithful. She did her best to think as little as possible of the events preceding her departure, and yet there were times when her whole being

cried aloud for love and comfort: both hopelessly far from her, so she clenched her teeth and fought on, trying not to think.

Ardclare was as impossible for a place of refuge as The Gleanings, and she put all idea of return there away from her. How could she return and shatter Dada's peace of mind and tranquillity? People would only talk and be unkind, for she knew the temper of her little world perfectly well. Beyond Miss White and Milson, and probably poor Finney, every one else would pick up a stone to hurl at her. Lady Dun would lead the phalanx of the righteous who felt that a woman's place is with any kind of husband, and she could not go about pleading her own justification. Some would cut her, and others accord her but scant mercy, and it would all fall upon Dada, who must be protected. So long as they all knew nothing, he would be the very last to suspect, so that she kept on writing cheerful letters, and she swore to herself that she would bear her burden alone, and without murmuring.

Life was not a sweet, joyful place, where good things happened, but a miserable cul-de-sac, and it was lonely and grubby in the bottom of the bag.

During the second week, she began a fresh campaign and went from one jobmaster to another, asking for work as an instructress, but no one wanted to learn to ride side-saddle, and she was once more turned down with monotonous persistency. She had nothing to give in exchange for a living unless she chose the last solution and went on the streets. The very seriousness of her position made her pert of tongue, and she often wondered at herself during those dreadful days. People grew unreal. She watched them anxiously, all these strangers who had their own life-histories, wore clothes and ate food, and yet could not convince her of any fundamental reality in themselves; and once she was in the street she felt as unreal to herself as any of them. Then, too, she was beset by her fear of losing her purse; and there was no one in the whole of London to talk to.

Things grew no better, and she took the wedding ring that Clint gave her in those incredibly happy days, and decided to sell it at a pawn shop. The proceeds might possibly keep her in buns and tea for a week. After that she would have five pounds left, and after that . . . she felt her eyelids pucker and self-pity caught her throat as she told herself that the river was deep, cold and dependable.

It was very cold in her little garret of a room, and she sat on her bed and held the ring in the palm of her hand. Who could tell to what strange ends things would eventually come? Where *did* things get to? Photographs once treasured, and all the presents people had been given? She had left Simon Western's watch on the side of a basin in a cheap restaurant, where the water had been hot and she had tried to give herself rather more of a wash than is usual in such places.

When she left the shop she discovered her loss and retraced her steps quickly, but it was gone, and no one could tell her anything about it. That was the way; you put things down and were never able to lay hands on them again. She was going to sell her wedding ring, and she did not care. One blessing was, once you grew sufficiently hungry you really did not care what you sold. Georgie had endured six weeks of misery, and was getting callous at last.

She put on her hat and walked down the staircase which lifted itself flight after flight to her cold room at the top, and decided that she would go up to Oxford Street as it was easy to get at. Her ignorance of London was a constant trouble to her, and she was always losing herself in side streets. As she slammed the door behind her she thought how horrified Dada would be if he could guess her mission.

Once she had work to do, she could change her quarters and tell Dada to address his letters to her, care of a newspaper shop. The thought worried her constantly, and she was obsessed by it as she walked through the indifferent crowd. Crowds depressed her now, and she took no interest in them any more. She was afraid to look at a man after her experiences in the Strand, or to loiter along admiring the beautiful things in the shops. She was marching with a huge, ugly army, yet she could not speak to any of her comrades, because they were all suspicious and might think she meant something wrong.

Her own loneliness appalled her, and she climbed into a bus, sitting down near the door. Was no one ever kind in this overwhelming world of strangers?

Georgie's imagination began to play odd little tricks with her. At one moment she was in the bus with a whole crowd of tired people, some standing nearly on her feet, and at another she was riding Skinny Jane, a hunter that had belonged to Milson Rogers, and because of an old saddle gall was ticklish just over the quarters. She could see Milson's pointed face

and sharp eyes, and the laugh in them. And then, without knowing how she got there, she was in Ardclare Church, Lord Duncarrig reading the lessons, and she heard the intonation of his voice clearly.

"Whither *thou* goest, I will go, where *thou* lodgest, I will lodge. *Thy* people shall be *my* people, and *thy* God *my* God."

She sighed and returned to the present, and the bus stopped with a racking jerk at Oxford Circus, the people in the centre pushing roughly out, while others at the further end were now disclosed to her, and she saw with a paralysed sense of emotion that she had been travelling with Lousada.

Her first idea was flight, but on second thoughts the prospect of having some one to speak to was too precious to be thrown recklessly aside, and when he looked at her she smiled as she was borne outwards, and waited for him on the pavement.

He looked just the same. There was some unalterable quality in Lousada, and his reddish skin and sandy hair gave him an appearance of tremendous health and vitality. His veiled, grey eyes smiled.

"So here we are again," he said, raising his battered hat.

"And you've not run to a new caubeen either," she replied critically. "Your hat's a show, Mr. Lousada."

"Evidence of fidelity," he remarked.

"Well," she said a little vaguely, "and how are you?"

"Will you lunch with me?" he suggested. "Or are you up for shopping?"

Georgie flushed and looked away. "I could lunch with you," she said, ashamed of her feeling of hunger. "Indeed, I'd like to."

"Good," Lousada replied, and he studied her carefully. "I'm not up in restaurants. Do you know of anywhere?"

"Somewhere near," she suggested, though it was still early. "I'm fearfully hungry."

"Splendid," he said in friendly tones. "We will walk into the first fairly decent-looking place and take our chance."

At last life was real again for Georgie. She had stepped back out of the country of bad dreams and was on firm land once more. But the luncheon was not going to be unalloyed pleasure, for she would have to pretend, and she had an uneasy feeling that Lousada was not readily deceived.

They walked into a small restaurant, which was still empty

and dark, and the white cloths on the tables gleamed like patches of snow left over after a thaw, but the place was warm and clean, and a waiter rushed towards them, captured them and set them in a corner, while he turned on an electric light, screened by a pink shade.

It was heavenly to be out of the crowded loneliness of the streets, and to be anchored even for an hour, and Georgie's eyes grew bright as she smiled at him.

"Shall we let ourselves be fed or shall we order food?" he enquired. "I always envy a man who can take up a menu card and select things. I expect Clint can do that kind of thing, can't he?"

At the mention of her husband, Georgie grew serious again. "Oh, yes, he's awfully clever that way," she agreed.

"Who is he giving lunch to, this time?"

"I'm up on me lonesome," she replied. "Eustace isn't here at all."

Lousada handed himself over to the waiter, and waved him away. "Yes, anything, and some red wine. You'll drink red wine, won't you?"

"I don't mind if I do," Georgie agreed. She intended to take whatever the gods provided, asking no questions.

"Now, that's done," Lousada said in the tones of a man who is satisfied. "Tell me all the news. How is your father?"

"Going strong," she glanced down at her hands and became aware that her wedding ring was missing. It lay in her pocket, and she wondered if Lousada would notice its absence.

"And Lady Mayfield?"

"Nell's all right."

"Everything, in fact, is highly satisfactory?"

"I'm awfully sick of England," she said suddenly and with feeling. "I think it's a horrid old place, and I wish to goodness I'd never come here."

"What's wrong with it?" he asked; and the waiter planted a selection of *hors d'œuvres* between them.

"The English are hypocrites," she said defiantly. "There's something fearfully mean about hypocrites."

"One minute," he interrupted her, "you are speaking of the people you have met at The Gleanings. Every country is damned by its upper middle-class, your own as well as this. Go lower, and you will find something better."

"Maybe," Georgie said thoughtfully, "yet I don't know. In

the shops they're as unkind as anywhere else." She felt that she had made a mistake, but it was too late to recall it, and Lousada helped her to some wine, and made no comment whatever.

"They don't b'lieve, you see," she said hastily. "In Ireland people speak of the will of God, and they mean it. Only, here, no one speaks of that."

"Perhaps the will of God continues all the same," he said; and she glanced at him to see if he were laughing at her, but to her relief he looked quite serious.

"I've been thinking a heap lately," she said lamely. "I don't know why."

"It's given you two small lines," he said. "After all, is it worth it?"

Georgie put her elbows on the table. Her blue velvet hat framed her face, and Lousada thought that she looked almost beautiful in spite of a shadowy suggestion that something was wrong. Her hands were not very clean, and she was wearing no rings.

"If you thought a thing mattered," she said, "would you allow anyone down-face you over it?"

"No. Why?"

"Even if it meant a heap of trouble?"

"I don't think I should let that alter my views. In fact, can one alter them to order?" He seemed interested, and then he asked her a question. "Who brought you up?"

"Is it rared me? Why, Kate Love and Dada between them, with the help of Miss White. But she had it that she came on board too late, and that I'd learnt my pronounciation from poor Katie, and couldn't be cured of it."

"Then, logically, you are in for rough weather," he said when he had reflected for a moment. He was thinking that Clint must be tired of the toy, and was arriving at the phase when he would want to break it in bits. "My advice to you is the same as it was first."

"Never do anything I don't want to do," she laughed almost wildly; "I've not forgotten it, you see."

"Is anyone trying to force you to do anything else?" he asked.

"Only myself," she retorted. "Don't let's talk of it, it's all silly nonsense enough, Mr. Lousada. Tell me, have you a sister?"

Lousada shook his head. "I've no one," he replied. "Not

now, at least. They died—I mean, my father and mother, when I was quite young.”

“Oh dear! How shocking. I’m awfully sorry. When I think of Dada and all he’s done for me, I understand.”

“One has memories,” he said evasively. “Anyhow, I grew up, and here I am.”

“And what do you do? Oh, you told me, you’re in an office. It’s hard to believe that, Mr. Lousada. Were you ever all alone, without a Christian to speak to? Wouldn’t that be a queer way to be?”

“I am usually alone, and as for Christians to speak to, I know so few.”

“Suppose you were stranded high and dry, and that no one cared a rush what happened to you?” She was on the verge of breaking down, but the reappearance of the waiter forced her to control herself.

“I am quite doubtful if any one does care,” he said. “But why all these questions?” he watched her again with the same intent look. He opened his case and gave her a cigarette, which she lighted with a sigh of joy.

“God be good to the man who invented cigarettes,” she said ecstatically. “I’ll collar a couple of them, if it’s all the same to you.”

“Will six see you home?” he asked. “Wait, I think I can get a box here.”

She smoked silently for a few minutes, her eyes dreamy and full of thought, as he selected a couple of gorgeous-looking cardboard cases from a tray. “Turks, Russians, and Virginians,” he said, taking out a handful of silver and paying for them. “Funny, isn’t it, to burn paper like that?”

“Awf’lly,” she replied, her mind distant from him. Once again she was beset by the sense of living in two worlds, and the unreality of the sordid side of the days was intensified. She must have dreamed it, and those fearful interviews when she had tried to get the elegant ladies in the big shops to give her a trial, or those other days when she had gone humbly to poor little places and begged piteously for employment. Was she really Georgie? She could forget it for a moment, only that she must so soon face it once more. And the jobmasters who did not want her, and all the other people in London who did not want her, and lastly, Mrs. Bank, who, directly she failed to pay, would certainly not want her. Clint did not want

her either, and so there was only Dada left who did, and to him she could not turn, because, in the dreadful conditions of affairs, even if Dada *did* want her, well . . . why, of course, he would continue to want her, only it complicated everything so dreadfully. Lousada did not interrupt her, he seemed to have thoughts of his own which occupied him. "A penny for your thoughts," she said at last, coming back to him.

"I must have time to put a pinch of salt on a tail," he said, awaking and smiling at her. "Which of them?"

"That's true," Georgie commented. "They have a tricky way of getting off with themselves, I know it of old."

"I was thinking of your problem," he said, hunching his shoulders, "other people's problems are always interesting because one can solve them easily, which is different with our own. Every woman really governs her husband. That is my first point."

"Does she, indeed?" Georgie winked at him. She winked because she felt peculiarly miserable.

"Once upon a time," he said, craning his neck forward, his eyes smiling at her over his large nose, "there was a Sultan of Turkey, and at an audience he held in his palace a poor man came to him and begged for a *firman*, which is the Sultan's permission to do certain things. It happened that day that the Sultan was in a good temper, and he asked the poor creature what he wanted it for. The man explained that he wished to tax every husband who was under the thumb of his wife, one halfpenny."

Georgie listened contentedly. She liked the idea of being told a story, it kept the shadows at bay.

"The Sultan granted the necessary permission," Lousada continued, still smiling, "and some years went by. One Friday, when the faithful were on their way to the mosque, the Sultan saw a man riding in his train with a great assembly of servants, and as he appeared rich and powerful, he asked his name and desired that he should be brought to him. This was done, and the man knelt before the Sultan. 'I am he to whom you once granted a *firman*,' he said. 'From every man who was afraid of his wife, I have taken one halfpenny, and so I am now, through grace of the Sultan's generosity, a rich man.' The Sultan laughed, and called his courtiers to listen. 'And out of my gratitude I have brought a gift to thee, Lord and Ruler, a beautiful Circassian slave.'

"The Sultan looked doubtful. 'It is well,' he said, 'but first let me consult with my head wife, for the ways of the harem must be observed.' 'And will you then also, Lord and Ruler, give me a halfpenny?' " Lousada knocked the ash off his cigarette.

"So you see, even when people are Sultans, they are often, in reality, ruled by their wives."

Georgie looked at him nervously. "Is that so?" she said. "Perhaps it is."

"I suspect you of having married a Sultan," he said. "You see, I knew Clint ten years back."

"And if he is?" her voice was tremulous, "I can't put a new pair of ears on him, as Jacky Laffan said when he bought a donkey instead of a jennet, because he was drunk at the time."

"Tell me, are you really having a row with Clint, or did I only imagine it?" he said abruptly.

She closed her eyes and thought of the streets and the faces, the awful multitudes of strangers by which she was surrounded. What a relief to tell him the whole story, but then, Clint was her husband and it was mean to tell tales. She collected herself with an effort and decided to lie, but to do this convincingly she had to look down.

"We're as thick as thieves," she said in cheerful tones. "Now and then we fall out, but by way of no harm. None of us are perfect."

Lousada signed to the waiter and paid the bill; his calm seemed so profound that Georgie was reassured, so she ventured again.

"D'you b'lieve in God, Mr. Lousada?" she asked in a husky voice.

"Yes," he said, replacing his change in his pocket.

"I'm glad of that," she said, fastening her coat. "Because if one does b'lieve, nothing really matters."

"Not if you look at it that way." He took down his coat. "But you come from a land where martyrdom is in the sod. Don't make yourself a martyr, only because it's Irish."

"Is it me a martyr?" She giggled self-consciously.

"I have a feeling, and I go a great deal by my 'feels'—some kind of inward whispering gallery—that you are, most unfortunately for your own comfort, an authentic Irishwoman,

with a racial tendency towards martyrdom. I'm sure you need a conventional standard."

"Nell was always laughing at principles," Georgie said, reminiscently. "Silly nonsense, I s'pose."

"Then you have made up your mind to tell me nothing?"

They were in the street now, and Georgie saw the remainder of the day stretched gaunt and haggard before her; he was just going away, never perhaps to return, and this might be their last meeting. He seemed to divine her thought, for he took a card from a pocket-book and gave it to her.

"My club address is in the corner," he said. "It looks as though I were becoming less of a fatalist? Where are you off to now?"

"Oh, the moon, once it's up," she said, fighting her depression which leapt upon her like a tiger, "by way of Piccadilly Circus. What a funny name they have on these places, Mr. Lousada. Circus, indeed. 'Tisn't my idea of a circus. We used to go to them every single year in Ardclare, and I used to dream that I'd be a dancer, and jump through paper hoops."

"Even martyrs may have frivolous dreams," he suggested. "You are the first I have known at all well."

"You and your old martyrs," she retorted, "and you making game of me."

"Drop me a line from the moon," he said, holding her hand loosely for a second. "It sounds rather a nice place, only a long way off."

"If you'd come from Ardclare, you'd have said I was often th' old man with the bundle of sticks. That is, if you were Mrs. Francis or Clementina Sharkey."

"Oh, I'm only one of th' English," he replied, and he watched her go away, until she was lost in the surging crowd.

And then he, too, turned away, looking outwardly calm and assured, but his mind was by no means at rest, and the question he asked himself was, "Why has she not told me, why couldn't she let me help her?" and then he reasoned that after all, Georgie was just Georgie and must go her own way, having, what is a wonderfully rare attribute, the courage to do so alone. No confidants, no ally with shelter to offer, none of the excitement of being a heroine of some kind, however dubious, standing in the limelight. Not a single support to cling to, with a strange world around her. But he smiled the smile of a man who has suddenly seen something very beautiful and satisfying.

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. CAMPION SANDYS was going through a period of mental aggravation. She was a good-looking woman of something over forty, with fine features, straggling hair with no curl in it, and a slender figure. Her eyes were the eyes of a philanthropist, with the eager vagueness of a follower of many lights. She had a flat in Chelsea, at the top of a large converted house, which reflected her views. You could gather a good deal from studying the backs of her books in the shelves at either side of the fireplace, and among these were the works of Mr. Havelock Ellis, Mr. E. D. Morel, Professor Patrick Geddes, Mrs. Besant, Mr. Eustace Miles, Mr. Rawson, Sir Rabindranath Tagore, and the pioneers of many different movements. There was hardly any League concerned with public service of any kind to which Mrs. Sandys did not or had not belonged at one time or other. She was progressive in the sense that she wandered from one cause to another and was equally enthusiastic about all of them while her zeal lasted, dying down only to rise upwards again in the service of another Cause.

As she had long since devoted herself to the well-being of the world outside, it was no grief to her when Campion Sandys passed over. She was a spiritualist at that time and was able to continue her conversations with her husband through a medium, whom she discovered to be a fraud only when she had exhausted the possibilities of revelation and was going through the materialistic phase, which followed. Soon after Campion's death, she established herself in the little flat in Chelsea and gave her whole undivided energy to the promotion of good works. By temperament she was broad-minded and intense, and believed that she had escaped from the snare of individual affections by bestowing her love upon humanity in general.

Her mystic eyes and deep, sweet voice made her attractive and she had a great deal of personal charm. As was natural, she was a tremendous talker, and had a secret love for lime-light which developed during the suffrage campaign, when she held informal meetings in Sloane Square, and grew into a

habit of expressing her views in the style of a popular speaker. Her time was crowded with appointments, and she sat on a number of Committees and Boards, and had stood as a candidate in the municipal elections and very nearly got in. Her flat was a centre of energy, and she collected numbers of people in her vague way, but most of all she was pledged to the help of her own sex. It is a little disappointing to have to record of her that her friendships were as hectic and ephemeral as her love of the new Causes in which she enlisted herself, and she had a way of finding people out when she got to know them too well. In fact she shed her chosen companions as regularly as she discovered something new which seemed to her to be the explanation of life; and though she was seldom bitter against former allies, she suffered from disillusionment, which invariably urged her the more violently towards her latest discovery, either in friends or in work.

As she was quite indifferent to household matters she was, in a way, at the mercy of her domestic ruler, and after a "treasure" had been with her a month or less, some crisis occurred which proved conclusively that Mrs. Sandys had been once more deceived in her judgment of human nature. Her flat was small and compact, and had a solemn effect. The walls of the sitting-room were papered in dark grey and the furniture was angular and uncomfortable, but it did not lack distinction and might have been the room of a rather sentimental don, who had a mission which forced him towards the dawn of wide liberty.

Her enemies said of her that she was always spoiling just Causes by her fatal habit of exaggeration, and felt that she deterred people who would otherwise have joined, through an unbalanced zeal, but she was quite genuine and most of her income went to the support of her last found enthusiasm.

Still, however spiritually minded man or woman may be, it is necessary to have a cook, and some one to do the dusting, and Mrs. Sandys was at the mercy of this general rule. Her ideal domestic helper was one who would regard her work symbolically, and who would feel that there was real distinction in waiting upon her; the ideal being just about as difficult to find in a general servant as it is anywhere else. Mrs. Sandys, with the best intentions in the world, was not always sympathetic. She expected a great deal, though she did not

know it, and since she had become a strict vegetarian, the problem had grown in difficulty.

"I want a thinker," she said in her charming voice. "Some one who will be on level terms with me." But when it came to facts, the "level terms" had a way of vanishing, and then she spoke of "vulgar minds." She had, behind all her gentle vagueness, a sharp eye to the quantities used in the kitchen, and frequently the whole alliance ended in a row. As she was very sensitive, and any kind of criticism hurt her feelings, a domestic upheaval was disastrous to her work, so that she suffered considerably. She had tried ladies, who were very incompetent, she thought, and who did not seem to be ladies and were given to arguing with her, and she had tried reformed drunkards and girls with a bad mark against their name, and just then she was suffering from a few direct and well-placed phrases from a cook-general who objected to what she called "poking and prying."

"I took you without a reference," Mrs. Sandys protested heatedly, "and now I very much regret it."

"And where do I come in?" the girl asked. "The boot is on the other foot, if you ask me. We have to go out to places knowing nothing at all of them, and stand the chance of being made miserable or starved to death. It's we who should give you a character."

"I shall not keep you," Mrs. Sandys said angrily, and the girl replied that for no consideration would she remain. She had washed up the previous night for six unexpected guests, and as it was her evening out she felt the righteousness of her grievance.

"But you should regard it as a privilege," Mrs. Sandys explained. "Mr. Fenton and Mr. Archdale Annesly are doing wonderful work in the world," and she left the kitchen disgusted by the ingratitude of the domestic helper.

The girl went away at once, which was also intensely irritating, as Mrs. Sandys never knew whom she might not wish to entertain. She was due at a committee meeting of the "Health and Hope League," and if she rushed to a central registry office she might have time to interview a successor who could step at once into the vacant place. She did not want to pay large wages, and was careful on these points, though her subscriptions were usually lavish and she gave more than a tenth of her money to charity, but some queer little kink in her mind caused

her to be parsimonious at the wrong place, which inevitably reacted on her own head.

She decided to rush to get a stop-gap, if nothing else offered, and she put on her hat and coat in the small bedroom which opened from the sitting-room. Every one said it was nearly impossible to find a girl who could cook, but as she was a vegetarian it mattered less than it might otherwise have done.

With a sigh over her own troubles, she left the flat and took a passing bus which conveyed her as far as Regent Street, and she made her way to the doors of a large registry office, where she was already well—even too well—known.

A woman with a set of shining false teeth, and a very ornately dressed head of white hair, which also discouraged confidence, looked at her through glasses, and greeted her by name. "Not another failure, Mrs. Sandys? Dear me, this is too bad. I always say that the girls nowadays are far too independent."

"I don't object to independence," Mrs. Sandys replied earnestly. "You must not say that, because I encourage it, but I want a girl who will see the beauty of work."

The woman with the pince-nez smiled quite savagely. "I am sure we will find one on the books. We have had to raise our fees on account of the cost of living." Mrs. Sandys looked slightly worried, but laid down a ten-shilling note, feeling a shade less friendly as she did so. "I will send you a list of names," the proprietress of the registry office said cordially, "one of them is sure to suit." She was always very polite to Mrs. Sandys, who could be counted upon to pay her fee at least four or five times in the year, and so she had reason to appreciate her.

"But I must have some one now," Mrs. Sandys moved her hands dramatically. "Ethel Pratt walked out on the spot. You understand that with so many calls upon my time I simply cannot do the housework. It's impossible."

Mrs. Foss, the proprietress, shook her head doubtfully. "I have one or two girls in this morning," she said, looking towards a door on her left, "but no one I can recommend for your work."

"I require so little," Mrs. Sandys protested. "Since I have discovered that I think so much better on vegetable foods, I really only want a strong pair of arms, and some one with a love of work for work's sake."

Mrs. Foss permitted herself to smile. "If you are in such

immediate difficulties we must see what can be done," she said, with the manner of a duchess, "but remember, madam, I do not advise you to engage any of the girls I have at the moment." She took out a list and glanced over it, murmuring the names to herself.

Mrs. Sandys was seated on a chair near the table, and a bright fire burned in an open grate. She forgot all about the question at hand and began to go over the short address she intended to give in an hour's time. She dressed plainly but well, and her face in repose was sad and rather saintly, as though she might have sat for a Madonna to a modern artist who made a living by painting popular religious pictures.

"Georgina Desmond!" Mrs. Foss read out, "not placed so far. No former experience and has never been out. Says she can cook and do housework, and is twenty-three. No references."

Mrs. Sandys awoke from her thoughts. "I haven't time to verify any, as the case stands. It is urgent, as I told you. What did you say?"

"I have a girl twenty-three who has never been out. She is Irish." Once again Mrs. Foss gave a quick, inquisition glance towards her client. She had formed her own opinion of Georgina Desmond, and felt that she would not be easy to place. In fact, she disliked her, but Mrs. Sandys was sure to be delighted at first, and equally disappointed later, whoever it was, so she felt that it might be a chance.

"Irish?" Mrs. Sandys grew interested. "I am very much occupied with Irish questions. The women over there have shown so little intelligence with regard to the franchise; and are they not very bad servants?"

"There are exceptions to every rule," Mrs. Foss replied judicially. "Desmond may be one. Will you see her?"

"I have just ten minutes," Mrs. Sandys said in a flurried voice, "and of course I must settle this wretched question."

She got up and walked into a small room, cold and dank, where she had interviewed numerous other prospective servants; she always felt a little nervous when called upon to do so. Long habit had not cured her. She sat down again and fiddled with the papers she carried and then the door opened and Mrs. Foss spoke in her commanding, officious voice. "Here is Miss Desmond, Mrs. Sandys. She will answer any questions you may like to put to her."

Mrs. Sandys looked up and felt a slight sensation of sur-

prise. She had expected something different, though what, she could not have said. Georgina Desmond wore very good clothes, and a smart hat, and her first thought was that here was a soul to save. The girl could never have got those clothes honestly, and it rather inclined her towards engaging her. She thought next, that for any one so young, the girl looked as though she had suffered a great deal, and there was something very taking about the curious, half defiant blue eyes which met her own.

"You are Georgina Desmond?" she asked, smiling kindly

"I am."

"You've not been in service before? I don't call it service, really," Mrs. Sandys explained, "only one has to use some word. I mean, you've lived with your people."

"Over in Ireland, that's my home." The inflection in Georgie's voice pleased Mrs. Sandys, and she thought of the Abbey Theatre. It would be quite new to have some one who talked with such an attractive brogue, and she smiled again, and to her pleasure, the smile was returned.

"And you've come to England to improve yourself. Quite right." She began to think that after all, Georgie might have been given the coat and skirt by an aunt, only the hat was so unmistakably Bond Street.

"I've got to get work," Georgie replied guardedly, lowering her eyes at once.

"Ah, I see; probably you did not think that you would ever have to, at one time? Can you cook?"

"I'm not at all so bad at cooking," Georgie pronounced the word as if there were three o's in it. "I can make sponge cakes that would melt in your mouth, reely, I can, and though Kate'd hunt me if I tried roasting or boiling, I am pretty sure I can do it."

"Kate is your sister, I suppose?" Mrs. Sandys smiled again and looked at her wrist-watch anxiously. "I never eat meat. It's poison."

Georgie raised her hand to her mouth, with an involuntary gesture and hid a broad smile. She was utterly miserable and wretched, but Mrs. Sandys amused her, and she liked "the cut" of her well enough.

"You can cook vegetables?"

"Indeed I can," Georgie said recklessly.

"And you are clean and careful. I hope, too, that you are scrupulously honest?"

Georgie flushed and felt hostile, but she made an effort to conquer her sense of affront. "I've never stolen anything, if you mean that?" she said. "I am honest."

Their eyes met, and Mrs. Sandys felt satisfied. "Are you really fond of work?" she asked. "I do not *ever* exact anything, and you will be quite at home with me. I want a girl whom I can trust, and as I live all alone there is almost nothing to do. You can go out whenever you are free. It is a question of personal honour, and I never interfere, though of course," she added hastily, "I am particular about cleanliness and early rising. You see, I give up most of my time to really serious things, so I have to rely a great deal on the girl who undertakes my work."

"It sounds grand," Georgie said with a sigh. She was feeling rather giddy from want of food, and wondered how long it could be before she was required. Mrs. Foss had discouraged her hopelessly, and every lady whom she had interviewed declined even to give her a trial.

"You are quite healthy?" Mrs. Sandys looked at her more closely. "Or are you always pale?"

"I have a fine blush when I'm in the country," Georgie said, "only in London the streets and all that, take away from the air."

"Where are you staying?"

Georgie gave the address of a Salvation Army Hostel, and Mrs. Sandys looked astonished. Evidently the girl was all but destitute. She reconsidered the wages she intended to offer, and felt that ten shillings a week was ample for anyone who must be quite penniless.

"I hope they treat you well there?" she said. "I know Lady Bancombe, who has interested herself in the work."

"Not too bad," Georgie replied. "I play the harmonium, as I know most of the Sankey's; we have 'Row to the shore, sailor' and all the ones I know." Her eyes filled and she took out a tattered little pocket handkerchief and blew her nose hard.

"Then were you—are your people——?" Mrs. Sandys groped for a suitable word. "Something to say to the Established Church," she concluded, grasping at a concrete phrase.

"I'm a clergyman's daughter," Georgie replied.

There was a short pause, and then Georgie was seized by a fear that after all she might not suit, so she put her back into the contest. "I'd dearly like to come," she said, her face wistful and pleading. "I'm as strong as horses, and you'd find me satisfactory. Ever and always, except for a bit, I was used to housework, and at the hostel I've made meself useful. Though it's not much to boast of, it's quite friendly-like, and better than being alone."

Mrs. Sandys was moved to pity, even though the time in which she could express it was drawing to a close.

"You shall have ten shillings a week, and I will take you on a fortnight's trial. I will make you very happy, and if you understand the real beauty of work it will be so satisfactory." She got up, still speaking. "Very interesting people come to my flat, and there is a great opportunity for you to learn. We *all* have to learn, you know, and I still do so myself."

"Not reely," Georgie said, for she was thoroughly impressed.

"And I give help myself," Mrs. Sandys added, "though I am very busy. In working for me you are helping me to give my time to those who really need it." She gave Georgie a bright glance of encouragement. The girl interested her and she was curious to know her story, as she supposed it was the usual one of seduction. Her father was, of course, not a clergyman, and she had probably been deceived by a smart looking shop-walker. Mrs. Sandys had headed a campaign against shop-walkers and, during its run, had collected a mass of evidence, all of which went to prove that they were very untrustworthy gentlemen, only excelled in villainy by commercial travellers. In any case, she was sorry for Georgie and liked her none the worse, though, luckily for herself, she let no hint of her conclusions appear in her manner.

"Are you a Theist?" she asked, opening her bag and taking out a card.

"A what?" Georgie demanded.

"Only just to know whether you are Church of anything." Mrs. Sandys smiled with great intensity. "I have passed beyond the churches, myself, so I shall not be shocked if you say that you, too, have . . . dear me, I thought I had a card."

"I'm Church of Ireland," Georgie said stoutly. She could not quite follow the line of Mrs. Sandys's thought, but that much she could say unhesitatingly. "And since I came t'Eng-

land, I've been surprised at how few people go t'evening church."

"Ah, here we are." Mrs. Sandys captured a card. "The girl who was with me left me this morning, and I should like you to go direct to the flat. The caretaker will let you in if you give her this." She scribbled on it in pencil. "You can unpack and tidy up. I feel sure that the presses want cleaning—my last help was horribly careless—and burnt saucepans. You will find *Sensible Diet* in the kitchen drawer, to help you with ideas; but I eat almost nothing. In any case I shall be out to-night as I have to address the women workers at Hoxton." She grew more and more fussed as she spoke. "Regularity is *everything*, Miss—ah—er—?"

"Desmond," Georgie suggested.

"Miss Desmond, so that you need only provide for yourself. Cocoa and—oh, something—I am sure you will find something. See that there is plenty of cress, by the way, it is quite the most nutritious of the soft vegetables. I work a ten-hour day almost entirely on cress."

"Is it that I'm to go there now?" Georgie asked, keeping a tremble out of her voice as she spoke. "I have some luggage," she hesitated, wondering if she could ask for her bus fare or whether it was more polite to pretend she had it. Her last penny had gone in buying a stamp to put on a letter to Dada.

"That is the address. The first turn on the left just above the picture palace, and the second block of flats. Mine is at the top, but the caretaker will show you. Good-bye." She smiled and went out, leaving her bag behind her, only to discover her loss when she was far away in a bus. "I never leave things about," she explained to the conductress, "so I don't know how it could have happened."

Georgie possessed herself of the bag, borrowed some coppers and walked to the table where Mrs. Foss sat.

"I've been engaged," she said with a touch of triumph.

"You've got hold of a nice problem." Mrs. Foss pressed her lips together. "No girl ever stays with Mrs. Sandys, but it's a chance, and as you have no training you are very lucky to get it."

"She seems a nice lady," Georgie said. "What's up with her?"

"Do you mean, why is it the girls don't stay? Ah, I'll leave you to discover that for yourself. No use putting you off the

start. Very well, half your first month's wages. By the way, what terms did you make?"

"Ten shillings a week and all found." Georgie gave a little gurgle of laughter. It was all so queer that it had to be funny, or one would just sit down and cry, and she had cried so much of late that her tears were exhausted.

"I thought so. She paid Pratt fifteen. However, it will be a start," and Mrs. Foss stiffened and became regal again as a lady in heavy furs walked in. "It's Lady Comerforth," she said in an aside as her new client walked in, carrying a Pekinese dog, and Georgie turned away and hid her face until all danger of recognition was passed.

It had been an awful moment, and she suffered as she heard Constance Comerforth's light, tinkling voice inquiring with intense boredom for a "cook who *can* cook."

Yet she was saying prayers of wild gratitude in the depth of her heart for the mercy which had been vouchsafed to her, in that she was engaged as a general servant, and could have some kind of home once more. She need drop no lower for lodgings and could forsake the grimy hostel which had been indeed a last resort. Even to think of the stages between was dreadful and heart-breaking, and fear had a way of growing gigantic when the street lamps were lighted and London opened night doors.

She took a bus with complete assurance, for she was becoming practised in these things now, and, having collected her pitifully small belongings, set forth in the direction of Chelsea.

CHAPTER XVII

GEORGIE was immensely pleased with her new surroundings. She liked Mrs. Sandys's flat, and its charm was doubly intensified by contrast with her former wretchedness. It was clean, bright, and compact, and she wandered from room to room looking at the pictures and thinking that she would be very happy. Her demands upon life had shrunk, and she knew now that to have a clean room and sufficient food to eat was in itself a cause for great thankfulness. She had been through a process of milling which left her shorn of many illusions, and she tried not to think of the last two months, but to keep the devils at bay. Cold, ugly devils which had frightened her and stolen her courage.

Loneliness, hunger and desolation had dogged her faithfully, and her former pride in herself and a belief that she could conquer circumstances had died slowly into despair. She had written to Lousada from the hostel, which was her last stage in the dreary path of misery, and received no answer, so she guessed he must be away. You could not think that he had forgotten a friend, and Georgie was always just. It was sheer bad luck, for there was no one else to turn to, and she awaited an answer with ever-deepening disappointment. When she wrote she had asked him to send his reply to the stationer's shop where her father's letters were addressed, and avoided any explanation of what had happened, for there was a deep strain of reserve in Georgie, and it cost her a struggle to allude to Clint. Even in her letters to Dada she dealt in generalities and wrote of London with enthusiasm, saying that for the present it was to be her home.

Dada "never noticed," and that was a blessing. But, oh, those months! They had cost her so much in vitality, and when at last she accepted the idea of becoming a servant, it hurt somehow, because of Dada and what he would have felt had he known. They would all be shocked and aghast, and Milson, what *would* Milson have said, and Miss White? Miss White had a tremendous idea about what was due to social status, and

to think that Georgie was "in service" would nearly kill her on the spot. But none of them knew anything about life; that was the trouble. If they did, they wouldn't look so calm and happy.

Life was no easy game, but a desperate hand-to-hand encounter in which, unless you had a settled income, you came off very wretchedly indeed. You must have money or experience, and if you had neither it was like sliding into a black whirlpool. She contrasted her present self with the old Georgie, and wondered how she had ever been so innocent and foolish, and why she had believed in herself. As she went, she had received knock after knock at her self-esteem, and every one had humbled her. In the hostel they suspected her of bad ways, and though they had been kind, it was a strange kindness. The ladies whom she had interviewed at the registry office were curt and brief, and seemed to consider that she looked all wrong. She was under open suspicion again when she said she had never been out in service, and, in any case, no one cared whether she sank or swam. Yet they had humbled her, and reduced her sorely in her own eyes, until she was crushed to earth by the passing of the heavy wheels.

Mrs. Sandys had been the first to say a kindly word to her, and Georgie felt that the devotion of a lifetime could not suffice to show her gratitude. She thought her very beautiful and saintly, and when she had made a tour of the flat she was immensely impressed by the learning of her new employer. Mrs. Sandys read such deep books, the kind of literature which Georgie associated in her mind with men with big bald heads and tremendous brains. It would be wonderful to wait upon such a talented lady; and then, she had been kind.

She looked round the tiny bedroom where she was to sleep, and began to put it in order. There was a sepia copy of Burne-Jones's "Golden Stairs" over the bed, and she studied the faces of the girls who gazed out at her, wondering whether any of them had ever really tasted life. She decided that they had not, or they could not have looked so bland and expectant, and she put on a cap which she had bought for a few pence, and was tremendously entertained by the sight of her own face in the small mirror on the wall.

She must learn to say "M'am," and remember not to sit down in the drawing-room, and she must train herself to announce guests. Having got the bedroom into order, she began

to rehearse her duties, ushering imaginary visitors into the sitting-room, and laying the table with close and careful attention to detail. Her predecessor had not troubled to tidy up, and it was afternoon before the kitchen was thoroughly neat again. The man from the grocer's shop came for orders, and she gave him a list which surprised him. He seemed inclined to talk, and said that Miss Pratt had no words bad enough for Mrs. Sandys.

"Then I think she might have got off worse," Georgie said, taking up the cudgels for her mistress as she leaned on the door. "What's up with all the girls these times?"

The young man looked at her and smiled; he invited her to come to the pictures, and said that he was rather a quiet fellow, but that a little entertainment now and then did no harm to anyone.

"I've my work to do," Georgie said awkwardly, "and I don't go out."

"Think it over," he remarked, and, slipping his notebook into his pocket, he went away.

The day wore on, and Georgie was still busy. She had made tea for herself and eaten some odd-looking bread, with margarine, and her sense of delight grew deeper. It was wonderful to sit before the kitchen fire and feel that there was something to do through the long, dead hours of the day. Life had grown so empty, and she had come to hate the streets. She forgot that she was lonely and that she had once been so happy, because at least she was at rest again, and the searing anxiety had passed.

The flickering light made her feel dreamy, and she thought of how once she and Clint had lighted the drawing-room fire at the rectory together and had great fun over it. One of the worse parts of disillusion is that it not only robs the present, but steals from the past as well, and she could not recall him now, without the later memories intervening to destroy the image. He had been hers, but he was hers no longer, neither did she now belong to him, though she was still his wife.

One of her most marked attributes was an appreciation of small mercies, and Georgie was not bereft of her gratitude by the forces which had stolen so much else. She had been a homeless, penniless waif yesterday, and now she had shelter and food. Georgie smiled as she thought of the grocer's man, and thought him "a nice kind of lad." Nor did it trouble her that

he had failed to discern anything different in her to others who opened the door to him. She could not walk out with him or let him take her to the pictures, but there was something in his pale face that put her in mind of poor Finney, and she wished to be gentle in her refusal. Clint would have stormed and raged at the bare idea of his wife receiving such an invitation, but Clint, with much else, was of the dead past, for which there was no resurrection.

Her thoughts led her to a vague analysis of life, which was new to her, for Georgie usually accepted what she had been told to accept, without criticism. Who people were had mattered very much indeed in Ireland and in England. At home she had suffered a good deal from the contemptuous attitude of the county. A clergyman's daughter was accepted on half-terms, as it were, ranking well below the landowners who were conscious of their subscriptions to the "Sustentation Fund." So long as they were subscribers it made them feel immensely superior. She recollected the Sustentation Fund with a smile. Whenever Dada had any disagreement with a parishioner, there was the inevitable threat of the withdrawal of support, from ten shillings to twenty pounds. What a worry "th' old Sustentation Fund" had always been. It seemed to give the parish unlimited rights, and whenever they disliked something Mr. Desmond said in a sermon, they resorted to this useful argument. They usually beat Dada in the end, because he had a nervous, quiet disposition and avoided conflict. She shook her head as she considered the subject. Even in Ireland, or perhaps more especially in Ireland than anywhere, it mattered *who* you were. If you were a Burke of Farran Court, a Sheridan of Castle Coombe, or one of the Fitzgibbons of Templeanner, you might be as dull, untidy or uncultured as you pleased; it did not matter. You were above the law. In England it became more a question of money, and birth was of less account, but, again, who you were was far more important than what you were.

It came upon Georgie as a surprise when she discovered that this was an ancient lie, thrust upon the world by a strong minority. Character was the only real standard, and brains, courtesy and comprehension were not the sole property of the governing classes. She thought of Kate Love, who had mothered her since she could remember anything, and felt that it only showed how stupid people were to call such as she "com-

mon." The word had often been applied to Georgie herself. Lady Dun called her "hopelessly common," and so did Mrs. Clint. It was a great reproach, because she had learnt her accent from Kate; as though the way in which you pronounced words made all the difference. It was the standard of the "who's," or one of their standards, and they formed their sideways judgment by it, or by the fact that one hadn't been born at Templeanner, or one of the "places" large or small, in the United Kingdom.

Clint had lectured her times and times again on the awful results of social blunders. It was far worse to break one of the caste rules than to carry on an intrigue or get into debt. Georgie yawned and looked affectionately round Mrs. Sandys's kitchen.

Mrs. Sandys held different views on these subjects; she had met Georgie with real kindness and spoke to her as an equal. In some way she understood this queer puzzle of equality, and was ready to throw a bridge across the gulf.

At that very moment Mrs. Sandys was having tea at her club, with a group of rather ferociously earnest thinkers, and as they compared notes on the business of the day, she explained that she was once more in domestic difficulties.

"I have taken a girl who has no character," she said. "Very unwise of me, but the kind of thing I do."

"Dearest, you are always so recklessly kind," Miss Esmé Brash replied, struggling with her veil, which she swallowed when she spoke, and which got into her tea and tied itself into knots in her hair. "I never find it answers. Of course I am G. F. through and through; and the Girls' Friendly won't touch a questionable case. We expelled six at our meeting to-day."

"The G. F.'s are terribly hard," Mrs. Sandys replied. "I once belonged, but that was ages ago."

Mrs. Clint, who was sitting at the same table, mountainous and impressive, shook her head. She was "G. F. S." and Mothers' Union, and had no opinion of Mrs. Sandys, but they were fellow members of the Porch Club, which was composed of social workers of all kinds.

"You don't know these young people," she said, with an arch glance at Miss Brash, her "right hand." "I *do* and for that reason I maintain discipline. If you have taken a girl of bad character into your flat, you will regret it."

Mrs. Sandys flushed faintly. "Oh, you entirely misunder-

stand. I imagine it to be a case of seduction, and the girl seems both cheerful and attractive. She is Irish."

Mrs. Clint drew a deep breath. "Then you have my sincere sympathy," she said firmly, "if in addition to her unfortunate career she is also Irish."

"But the G. F. S. girl I tried was a dreadful person," Mrs. Sandys objected. "You have really no monopoly of the virtues, dear Mrs. Clint."

"Darling," Miss Brash broke in, "you are too kind. I took one of your girls after she had left you, and she simply did what she liked—just whatever she liked. Wouldn't wash my comb, either, or brush my skirt."

Poor Miss Brash looked as though no one ever brushed her, and she was incapable of doing anything for herself; but the little circle murmured in sympathy, and Mrs. Sandys got up.

"I ought to be getting back," she said. "I have to run out again for a general meeting of the Union of Rights at eight-thirty. Only a drawing-room meeting, with dear Frederick Loftus in the chair. He is always a draw, and we expect about fifty."

"Remember that I have *warned* you," Mrs. Clint said with emphasis.

"What news of your son and daughter?" Mrs. Sandys asked, tying a scarf round her neck. She had a vague idea that Eustace, his wife and Eleanor were hopelessly worldly, but she had not seen them for years. Mrs. Clint looked very black indeed as she replied to the question.

"They are both very well," she said in a repressed voice. "Yes, yes, quite well, thank you."

Miss Brash had no tact, looked horribly confused and dropped her handkerchief, nearly upsetting the table in her efforts to recapture it. "I always say," she remarked in her high, nasal tones, "that Eustace is the handsomest man in London."

Mrs. Sandys looked round the large, dark room, where the electric light seemed to be absorbed by the atmosphere. She had been one of the original founders of the club, and admired the intense masculinity of the smoking-room, where all the members usually sat, though there was a large and empty drawing-room in another part of the building. The chairs and sofas were covered in wear-worn leather, and rows of small tables made centres where women, most of them elderly, sat and drank tea and smoked Virginian cigarettes in long holders.

For a moment she wondered why it was that the world seemed to be full of elderly people who obviously did not care what they looked like. It troubled her a little, and then she reflected that pretty women who wore fashionable clothes were usually of no use in the world's work; they were haunted by the fear of looking old, and thinkers never preserved their youth very long. All the rugged, earnest or smug faces around her were the faces of workers, though some of them were annoyingly futile, while others were fanatics; strong "pros" or "antis," each with a mission which was to bring in the millennium. Mrs. Sandys herself had worked through circle after circle of enthusiasm, and was now becoming an individualist.

She stayed a moment longer while Mrs. Clint spoke affectionately of a philanthropic duchess; Miss Brash played her court card in the shape of a princess, and Mrs. Sandys added the name of a countess with socialistic leanings.

"I like to feel," Mrs. Clint said, "that our aristocracy are taking their share. How splendidly they always come to the front."

"Whenever there is a front," Miss Brash added enthusiastically, "and it is true that *noblesse oblige*."

"I am a Socialist," Mrs. Sandys said in her delicate, sensitive voice.

"Don't forget that I have warned you about that girl," Mrs. Clint said formidably as Mrs. Sandys turned to go, and then she entered into a conversation with Miss Brash, who always agreed with her.

Mrs. Sandys made her way back to Chelsea in a bus, accompanied by the usual resigned crowd of people, who looked persistently sad and depressed. She was slightly affected by the pessimism of Mrs. Clint, and hurried along the pavement when she got out of the bus and turned down a side street towards her block of flats. The time which intervened since she engaged Miss Desmond had rather dulled her impressions, and she wondered whether people like Mrs. Clint were usually right in the long run. The prophecies of those who disbelieved in human nature had a way of coming true, and it was discouraging to reflect upon this. Perhaps she would find the flat rifled, her plated spoons and the jam-glass mounted in silver gone, and her best hat with them. If so, she decided that she would never again undertake to employ a girl who brought no references.

She turned the key in the door with a feeling of anxiety,

but as she entered the hall she became reassured once more. Georgie was in the kitchen, singing to herself in a queer, husky voice, buoyant with great happiness, and the place looked tidier and cleaner than it had done during the reign of Miss Pratt.

"I hope you get on all right?" Mrs. Sandys asked, sinking into a basket-chair. "I have to be off again at once, so just make me a cup of cocoa."

"Gracious!" Georgie stood looking at her with admiring eyes; "but you do work hard. I never saw the like of it, Mrs. Sandys. What is it you're all doing?" She fetched the tray and filled the kettle as she spoke.

"Trying to make the world a better place," Mrs. Sandys replied. She was quite certain now that she liked Georgie.

"It's awfully good of you," Georgie said with conviction.

"Oh, no; it's only what every one should do. We want a better state of things, and I have given up my life to the work."

"Then it's a pity there's not more like you," Georgie replied, and she thought of her own idle, pleasant days at home and the complete indifference of the people who had come to The Gleanings. "My notion is, that the higher you get the less any one cares. It would surprise you how little the most of them mind."

"Not *all*," Mrs. Sandys said. "I have a very great friend who is a viscountess, and she is tremendously thorough. In fact, on one committee we have two countesses. I of course am a Socialist."

"I don't reely *like* th' aristocracy." Georgie took down a cup and put it on the tray; she did not notice the stare of half-amused surprise on Mrs. Sandys's face.

"You must not believe all you hear from other domestic helpers," Mrs. Sandys remarked. "I will drink my cocoa in here, Miss Desmond. Let me warn you against jumping to conclusions. As a Socialist, you may be sure that I am quite unprejudiced."

"And what are you going to do for the whole of us to-night?" Georgie asked with interest. "I think London's an awf'ly bad place"—her face looked tragic as she spoke—"and here in England people are fearfully selfish. Would you be able to cure them of that, now? Dada used to say that the world was so censorious, and only lately I've grown to know how true it is."

She sighed and shook her head. "But if Dada knew one quarter of what goes on, he'd be wild about it."

"All this interests me very much," Mrs. Sandys said, sipping her cocoa. "I had no idea that it was the case." She flushed and became nervous. "I would like you to regard me as a friend, a *real* friend, Miss Desmond, and if you wish to confide your trouble in me, you need not be in the least afraid that I shall be shocked."

"You're very kind," Georgie said guardedly, "awf'ly kind, but I never knew troubles mended by talk."

Mrs. Sandys felt hurt, but she hid her feelings, thinking that she had been too precipitate. "When we know each other better," she said, "and if you need advice. You look very young, but I am glad to see how fond you appear to be of your father."

"Dada's a lamb," Georgia said with a shining smile.

"Would you like me to write to him?" Mrs. Sandys asked. She had taken off her hat, and looked more than ever like a Madonna in modern clothing.

Georgie moved uncomfortably, and shook her head. "He doesn't know I'm in service," she said, looking down at the fire, "and I'd rather he'd not know."

"But he knows you are in London?"

"Oh, yes, of course he knows that."

"And *why* you left home?"

Georgie met Mrs. Sandys's look with candid eyes and a curious smile. "He knows all about that," she said unhesitatingly.

"I hope he is not troubled about it?" Mrs. Sandys persisted. She had a morbid desire to know the facts, and Georgie was baffling in her apparent lack of what Mrs. Clint would have described as "a sense of sin."

"Why would he be?" Georgie said, struggling in the face of what she felt to be an inquisitive and unreasonable desire on the part of Mrs. Sandys to force her to speak of her private affairs. "There wasn't anything to worry over. The reason I had to get work was on account of something quite different. Dada knows nothing at all of it, and I'd not worry him; he has worries enough without. Please don't be vexed with me, Mrs. Sandys, for you're very kind, and I would dearly like to explain, only . . . well, it's private, and I'd have to mention names and all that, which I won't do."

"You need mention no names," Mrs. Sandys replied. "I would like to help you. You know I took you on trust."

"For all that, I can't speak." Georgie shut her mouth firmly. "Not a soul in this world knows."

Mrs. Sandys looked at the kitchen clock, and sprang to her feet, taking up her hat and exclaiming at the lateness of the hour. "I shall miss the lecture," she said, "and only be in time for the discussion. Leave a glass of milk on the table for me and some biscuits."

"Then you won't get so much done, after all," Georgie said in tones of some disappointment.

"We have to be patient," Mrs. Sandys smiled. "What we aim at is to uplift the social conscience and break down class barriers. It takes time."

"Indeed, yes," Georgie replied, visibly impressed.

"Our idea is to build a better Britain," she went on hurriedly. "Oh, where is my bag? I left it at the registry office."

"I have it." Georgie disappeared down the passage. "I had to borrow two-and-six, Mrs. Sandys. Will you deduct it from my wages?"

Mrs. Sandys looked astonished and taken aback. "I never advance money," she said in a disturbed tone. "Never; still, for once, I will break my rule. Two-and-six, you said?"

"I'm very sorry." Georgie was penitent. "But I was—I didn't have any change, and I never thought you'd be put out."

Mrs. Sandys recovered herself, and glanced at a little sheet of pencil notes she had made, reading them over rapidly: "The elimination of preventible poverty"—she always found that alliteration sounded well on a platform or in debate—"the building of a better Britain." She then emptied the bag and counted the contents, which she found to be correct, minus half-a-crown, and once again she exclaimed at the lateness of the hour. "Frederick Loftus will be so grieved," she explained, evidently expecting Georgie to know the name of the elderly sere. "But, try as one *can*, it is impossible to get everything done."

"Indeed, yes," Georgie agreed.

"Later on," Mrs. Sandys said from the door, "you will have to come and listen when I have speakers here, and take your share in the making of the new world."

"Yes, indeed," Georgie said, feeling slightly breathless.

"You must rally to the call." Mrs. Sandys was outside the kitchen. "I always make a point of including my domestic

helpers in my own work. Don't forget the glass of milk and *two* biscuits; there were six in the tin this morning."

And though Georgie cleared away Mrs. Sandys's supper, feeling immensely impressed, she could not help thinking that her mistress "noticed things" rather wonderfully for a woman who had the reconstruction of the world in hand.

There were no novels, none at least of the kind she understood, in Mrs. Sandys's bookshelves, for any which found a place in the flat seemed to be more like social treatises, and had no story in their pages, so that she went to bed rather in the condition of a pigeon who has had a meal of shot, mistaking it for Indian corn. Words such as "co-operation," "civics," "citizenship," "social conscience," "municipal authorities" floated through her brain, and she felt again that Mrs. Sandys was "wonderful," which was the word chosen by Mrs. Sandys's own friends when they described her; she was a "wonderful woman." At last Georgie slept, and in her dreams she wandered through the garden at the rectory, where life seemed simpler once again.

CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER a time Georgie became more or less acclimatised in her new surroundings. Her liking for Mrs. Sandys grew perceptibly, and she understood that her employer was a woman who really did try to arrive at something definite. She was inclined to place Mrs. Sandys on a pedestal, and prepared to offer her sincere worship; and Georgie was hurt and distressed far more on Mrs. Sandys's account than her own, when there were all too obvious discrepancies between her professions and her practice.

She was close to meanness about money, though she insisted that it was "dross," and she had an eye like a lynx for the smallest suggestion of waste in the kitchen. This she accounted for by saying that in a world where so many were starving it was almost a crime to have enough to eat. She persuaded Georgie to become a vegetarian after the first week, and was very firm indeed as to the quantity of tea she should drink. Georgie's Irish propensity for tea-drinking distressed her, and she quoted statistics, and spoke of "the Irish tea face." Thus the scantiness of groceries and of "fat foods and grease," as Mrs. Sandys termed bacon and butter, was accounted for by high principles, and Georgie was assured that the reason was a noble one.

Her perpetual desire to know Georgie's own story arose out of personal interest in the girl, and Georgie found it becoming difficult to evade her questions. Mrs. Sandys did not seem to recognise any right of reserve, and was hurt by her servant's steady refusal to open her heart. She was hopelessly unpunctual as to hours, and made work for Georgie through a complete lack of consideration which was never meant. She was "busied with much serving," and explained to Georgie that she, in her humble sphere, was also taking part in a great forward movement.

Georgie had formerly heard very little of "movements," as such, other than political. There had been missionary meetings in the school house at home which she attended, and mission-

aries had come at intervals to the rectory to deliver lectures to the Protestants of Ardclare; but they dealt with the conversion of natives, and were popularised by the addition of magic-lantern slides. In Ireland no one dreamed of social movements, and the religious questions of the country seemed to prohibit such activities. The very word "league" called up memories of bands playing national airs and cheering crowds, baton charges by the police, and much drinking of porter; something entirely different to the well-dressed and orderly little gatherings that assembled to air their views in lecture-rooms and halls in London.

It appeared very strange to Georgie once she discovered that England was full of leagues, and Mrs. Sandys sat upon her quite heavily when she explained that she knew Father O'Doherty, who had been in trouble with the police on account of an ancient connection with the Land League.

"We are non-party," she said at once. "There is nothing so obstructive as party politics. We are non-sectarian."

Ireland did not trouble about social reform, and, as far as Georgie knew, only the turning of Mohammedans and Hindus into Irish Protestants was of real importance. People gave half-crowns to that end, and there were sales of work, also held in the school house, the profits of which went to the same cause.

Mrs. Francis Dykes was interested in "Protestant orphans," and as for social organisation, "non-political and non-sectarian," the very idea was staggering.

During her short married life at The Gleanings, Georgie had come right away from any form of religious or social effort of any kind. Nell had a fine contempt for any class but her own, and seemed to regard the masses as a careless observer regards monkeys at the Zoo. Public schools produced gentlemen and sportsmen, and any one who had not been so blessed as to start life with these advantages could logically be neither one nor the other. Clint hated having to subscribe to any charities, and spoke of "pauperising the poor." It was his reason for stubborn refusal when asked for money, and he also said it was "un-English."

Regarded from the point of view of The Gleanings, life was a place where you had as good a time as you could, where you spent fortunes on food, clothes and motors, and declined to believe that anything was wrong with the rest of the world.

Anyone who did think so was a "crank," or an "agitator," and could be serenely disregarded. The poor were the duty of the State, in some vague way, and of the Church. Were there not workhouses and reformatories for them all? And what more did they want? There were also prisons; and the upkeep of these establishments came out of the pockets of Clint and his class. They paid for Board Schools and outdoor relief, as well as the old-age pensions, and the general feeling was that already they gave far too liberally. Georgie had heard them talk like this when some one of a more serious turn of mind had been at the house; and the impression was that they were all hardly treated and over-taxed already.

They belonged to no league of any kind, but now and then they attended great charity balls or *matinées*. You could induce them to do something when they understood that it wouldn't be dull. Nell would pay thirty guineas for a dress, but when the clergyman called and asked for a donation for the waifs and strays, she very reluctantly parted with a ten shilling note, and Clint declined to give even as much, and improved the occasion by arguing that he had already been taxed to an extent which reduced him to penury. "You can't have it both ways," he said, though when Georgie asked him later how much he had given in charity before the taxes grew to such an alarming figure, he was vague in his reply.

While she had struggled in the awful outer darkness of desolation, Georgie had begun to feel dimly that "down and under" was a bad place, and especially bad, because not only money, but sympathy was absent. There were plenty of times when she would have valued a kind word far more than a gift of money, and she got neither.

In Ireland the beggars were on terms of friendship even with the aristocracy, and their life was by no means a bad one. People welcomed them, and they were a cheerful, nomadic class, who got quite a lot of entertainment along the roads. They told stories and sang songs, or carried the news with them if they were of the peripatetic school, and the locally established beggars collected what they called "the rent" from house to house, and were very seldom refused assistance.

In the great whirlpool of London, Georgie learnt something of the other side of life. People were rude in manner, sharp of speech and unkind once they suspected you of empty pockets, and dread had pursued her. She could not let her mind dwell

upon these weeks, and she tried to forget them. After all that, she now discovered a new world full of new people.

For the first time in her life she was in contact with a large group of men and women who wanted reforms, and she sat perplexed and bewildered amid so much philanthropy; pushed and hustled, as it were, from one question to another, and earnestly trying to listen to a number of voices all speaking at once. Kind, good voices, but slightly confusing to the untrained consciousness.

Georgie had rigid ideas as to right and wrong, and it startled her to discover that she must now realise that these things are all a question of circumstances. She sat alone and wondered until her head ached. You could work the whole problem back until you pinned the responsibility firmly to the coat of Clint and the other Clints, and King George; but though this was becoming clear to her, she felt that it had all been simpler when you believed that God had something to say to it, and that life was not what mattered, but just to live it decently in spite of the odds.

Mrs. Sandys was non-sectarian. She had adopted in turn almost every fashionable form of belief that had been in the world, so that she knew the futility of creeds and churches. She was now, so one of her friends said, "so clever that she was an atheist," and though she smiled indulgently when Georgie said that she must go to church, and that she wished to find a place of worship which was not like "a Catholic chapel," she made no use of her own conviction of philosophic doubt to shatter Georgie's illusions.

The more Mrs. Sandys considered the question of her maid, the more she perplexed her. She usually did consider her for about five minutes at least each day, and she came to know, greatly to her astonishment, that Georgie was a Puritan. It shocked Mrs. Sandys profoundly, because she regarded it as hopelessly narrow-minded, and the girl should have learnt something through her own mistake. Georgie had blushed furiously when Mrs. Sandys spoke one day of "prostitutes," and said that they were much to be pitied.

"Indeed, I'd be ashamed to think of them," she replied. "Decent girls have self-respect," and she seemed to be convinced that women, and not men, were to blame. Mrs. Sandys grew heated in the argument. She quoted case after case to crush Georgie's opposition, and the idea that such a soul was

also among the prophets aggravated her. "You should have tremendous sympathy," she said pointedly, "and yet you are full of prejudice."

"Men are very weak and foolish," Georgie said, her face troubled, "and I'd not pardon a man. Don't think I'm laying down the law, Mrs. Sandys. But for all that, it's true that no decent girl would go tempt a fellow. Those who do haven't a nice nature."

"Even if they are driven to it by starvation? Even if some wretched creature has betrayed them?"

"There was never a thing of the kind in our place," Georgie said. "That is, among the Protestants, and if it happened among the Catholics, Fawther Coffy raised such a scene that the world rang with it. There was trouble once through a chauffeur up at——" she stopped and faltered—"a big house near my home, and though he was a Protestant, Fawther Coffy turned him and made him get married. They went away to America after. Dada was awfully vexed, because he didn't like Crackenthrop being turned, but he said the principle was quite right, but it gives you an idea of how things are over there."

"To marry the unfortunate girl to a blackguard hardly seems a solution," Mrs. Sandys said in a voice of scorn; "but once you get priests and clergymen into any problem it always means disaster."

Georgie shook her head. Bad girls were bad girls, and she could not accept any excuse for them.

Mrs. Sandys reflected over their conversation later. She realised now that Georgie's father actually was some kind of clergyman, and, like Lady Duncarrig, she regarded her as hopelessly unsuitable. She smoked cigarettes, for Mrs. Sandys had smelt out that fact, and Georgie admitted it when asked. According to her principles, Mrs. Sandys had to permit this, but her deeper instincts revolted. Georgie seemed to have no real culture which one might look for in a parson's daughter, but she had certainly been brought up on church teaching. How she had erred and gone astray, or who the man could be, Mrs. Sandys could not guess.

She overheard the conversation with the messengers, and at times it appeared to her that Georgie had a queer freedom of speech. She was not stiff or aloof, but at the same time she could not be accused of being forward, and when, at the end of six weeks, the young man who came for orders from the

grocer's made a definite proposal of marriage in Mrs. Sandys's hearing, for the flat was small and his voice carried, she was struck by the gentleness with which Georgie refused his offer.

"I think a decent man's love is a very nice kind of a thing," she said in reply, "and I'm sorry, but it's no use."

The grocer's assistant urged that perhaps she considered herself above him, and he spoke of relations in a better class than his own. Furthermore, he was only coming for orders because she was in the flat, as he was a trusted assistant, and his first visit had been an accident owing to the illness of the messenger.

"You're awfully foolish," Georgie said. "I'm not so stupid, Mr. Laddy. If I cared about you or could marry you, I'd not mind if you came from the coal-hole, but I can't, and, remember there's as good fish in the sea as ever old Michael Hennesy pulled out of it in Youghal Harbour."

Georgie had been rather subdued and depressed for some days after the event, and Mr. Laddy came no more for orders from the grocery store.

Romance was one of the experiences which had encroached very seldom into Mrs. Sandys's life. Her group were not romantic, though many of them firmly believed in free love, and she was indistinctly aware that Georgie was one of those beings who carried a trailing cloud of rainbow colour around her. She began to alter her original theory, and felt that Georgie must be the victim of a love affair, possibly without having crossed the boundary, since the girl was so amazingly respectable, and for that reason had left her home. She had managed to meet a man, possibly of superior rank, who had trifled with her affections. As an alternative explanation of Georgie, it lacked drama and was ridiculously early Victorian; but then, Georgie was far behind the times, and it might be the case. She felt quite uncomfortable when she thought of how often she nearly put her foot in the past, for she became slightly sensitive about Georgie's strong opinions, and her too drastic standards of moral conduct. An innocent love affair would account for a great deal, and Mrs. Sandys rather reluctantly absolved Georgie from a mere exciting if sinful experience of life.

She received letters from Dada at stated intervals, and collected them from the stationer's shop at the Sloane Square end of King's Road, and occasional short scribbles from Miss

White. They were her chief joy, and she read them over and over again, filling in the bits which were left out and treasuring every scrap of news they brought to her. They told her little enough, but that little was precious.

She used to picture the quiet life as she poured over Dada's letters or deciphered Miss White's hieroglyphics, making out coherent sentences with difficulty, and in return she began to develop a perfectly wonderful gift for fluent lying with her pen. The reports she wrote to Dada were enough to content the most ambitious father who ever lived, and she described entertainments which she selected from the paper; plays which she had never seen and would never see, and alluded to important people whose names she took at random from lists of presidents and vice-presidents on the committees whose reports were to be seen on all sides of her in the flat. She also wrote of league activities and quoted Mrs. Sandys.

The real danger to Dada's peace of mind lay through the Duns getting to know that she had left Eustace, and repeating it in Ardclare. Lady Dun's friendship with Miss White was a menace, and Miss White frequently said that Lady Dun had no secrets from her, so that it was a huge relief to Georgie's mind when Mr. Desmond told her the eldest Duncarrig daughter had fallen ill, and the whole family gone abroad. Georgie knew that Lady Duncarrig's friendship did not extend to paper, and that so long as wide seas roared between her and Miss White she could regard herself as safe.

She did not look ahead, for there is much wisdom at times in short views of life, and Georgie was growing wise. Life had taught her that it is a great thing to have a roof, a moderately comfortable bed, and regular meals; she was young, healthy and strong, and the work she did was little more than a new form of exercise. She was proud of it, too, for she was on her own, and Mrs. Sandys, beyond inquisitorial examinations carried out after Georgie was in bed, did not interfere. The flat kitchen was gay, and Mrs. Sandys presented her with a copy of a Futurist painting which Georgie pinned against the wall upside down, and appreciated for its vigorous colour. There were other decorations which had once been in Mrs. Sandys's bedroom and were slowly working towards the dustbin; a glazed copy of "Come, Holy Ghost," a picture of St. Theresa, and framed sentiments culled from great thinkers of various groups. All these made the room look very unlike Georgie's own idea of

a kitchen, and Mrs. Sandys felt that at last she had found a girl who had a sense of the true beauty of work, but, for all this, she still paid her five shillings a week less than she had given to the slapdash and independent Miss Pratt.

Georgie often wondered where Lousada was, and if he had forgotten her. It would be a bit of fun to see him again, and she felt the need for some relief from the tyranny of new ideas. At length, after a day during which she had begun by burning a saucepan and ended by listening to statistics hurled at a few interested listeners by a lady policeman who talked of "gin faints" and described a house of ill-fame, she took out her writing materials and began a letter to Lousada.

"I'd like very much if I could see you," she wrote. "Any old time will do, as I am free most afternoons. I think the world's awful, don't you? I'd like to forget all about it, and pretend that it's not so bad. It usen't to be, in the days of yore, but the worst of doing a heap of good is that you get a kind of craving for giving people the shivers. I don't mean that I am up to the eyes in good works myself, but I'm in a job that gives me a chance to understand what the others are after, and I'm not the better of it yet."

She addressed the letter and ran out with it to the post.

"Could I have an afternoon off to meet an old friend?" she asked Mrs. Sandys, who immediately grew interested.

"A relation?" she asked.

"No, only a friend. Some one I used to know at home."

Mrs. Sandys considered the question. "It might be better for you if I refused," she said. "Are you quite sure it is wise, Miss Desmond?"

"Why not?" Georgie giggled self-consciously. "I may as well tell that it's a young man, but we're only friends, no more, and he's awfully nice."

Mrs. Sandys had an inspiration. "Ask him to tea in the kitchen," she said, "and perhaps I might be in in time to meet him. I really think that would be best."

Georgie looked a little disappointed. She had hoped for a meeting at a restaurant where there was a band playing and you could look at the people, but she was naturally obedient.

"Very well, so," she said. "And another time, if he asks

me out, wouldn't it be all right for me to go? Of course, he mayn't ask me, or he may be away, but if he did?"

"Have him here first," Mrs. Sandys said cautiously. It was odd to suspect Georgie of conduct which would be impossible to mention to her.

Mrs. Sandys was a woman with a sense of responsibility, and she felt that she would be more than a match for the man if he were once again upon the track of Georgie, seeking to compass her downfall.

CHAPTER XIX

LOUSADA was a man with a number of acquaintances and not many friends. People knew who he was, and he was to be met at a variety of different houses, but though he was memorable he gave you only a little to go upon, and had a trick of vanishing just as you felt you had got something closer to his real self. That he was strong no one could doubt, and his quiet manner disguised the fact that he was not in reality a quiet man. In fact, a number of legends and myths had sprung up around him, and while one day he might be met in Piccadilly, he was even then perhaps on his way to an outpost in an Eastern wilderness.

The truth was that Lousada was one of the homeless. We become entangled with relatives and are explained through somebody's knowledge of what our fathers did before us, or by the conduct of our aunts and uncles; but all this easy elucidation was avoided in the case of John Lousada. His headquarters was the Foreign Office, and his public life lay there, in the sense that when he was in England he could be seen sitting at a table inside that gloomy building and he returned to dingy rooms in Lexham Gardens when the day's work was done.

He was old for his age, and his red hair and harsh-featured face appealed more to the intellectual than the softer side of his acquaintances. He cared absolutely nothing for public opinion, nor whether people loved or hated him, which is an unpardonable attitude in the eyes of society and nearly as unpopular as a habit of speaking the truth. Popularity was, however, the very last thing which Lousada desired and he got on quite well without it. Inquisitive people who wanted to know more than he intended they should, usually had a bad word for him, and in argument Lousada had a fierce and even intemperate fashion of speech. Fools suffered at his hands, and therefore he had many enemies. His indifference was part of him, and he left his surroundings as they were when he had first arrived, so that nothing in his rooms gave him away.

They were a featureless conglomeration of weary necessities of life, which such rooms usually are, and had no trace of their owner's strong personality. He might have been a man without country, relatives or tastes, and yet he was far more really alive than the others. He had been doing things all the time. That was why he knew so much about life. The world is very much divided into two classes; those who know that anything can happen, and these are the men and women of action; and those who believe that nothing unusual ever really happens, and these are the huge, eventless majority who have ample time to analyse their thoughts and feelings.

With his tremendous vitality, he had begun with a desire to remove mountains, but at thirty-three he knew quite well that his faith was not sufficient for any such miraculous feat; yet he still flung his force against the mountains, and now and then had the satisfaction of creating a landslide.

Women had played only a small part in his own drama, which was wild enough and fantastic enough to make any respectable listener think him a liar, had he chosen to recount even a few of his experiences, but he did not recount them; he pushed them behind him and hurried on to the next job without turning to look back. He had been far too busy for the sick habit of introspection, and women had, somehow, been out of the picture also.

As he saw them, women were a devouring element; either you wanted to be eaten up by them, because of the joy it afforded, or you preferred to retain your self-mastery. That men were primarily responsible for the shortcomings of women Lousada admitted unhesitatingly. Women often lied out of their knowledge of the inability of men to bear the truth. Numbers of men preferred mental inferiority in a companion, and were charmed by mediocrity, for poverty of ideas is no crime, and may even be an asset. But Lousada discovered that the male mind was more to his own liking than the female.

Any excursions he had made into the whispering, feminine world had ended badly, and as for marriage, the thought of it did not even present itself to him. So he was lonely and, at times, aware of the fact. He had, possibly, evaded the chains of roses partly owing to the gregarious nature of his life. The atlas was his playing ground, and he travelled from Tokio to New York and from New York to Madrid wrapped up in the mystery of special Government service. He was attached now

to one section and now to another of the Foreign Office, and his restless activity drove him, as he said, like Satan, to walk up and down the earth.

What first attracted him to Georgie Desmond was her attitude of steady determination as she sat behind the curtain in the big drawing-room at Ardclare, and looked out over the garden. He had a keen eye for what Pater describes as "the passionate gesture," and at that moment he was up in arms against the surroundings in which he found himself. Clint's attitude towards life, and his belief that the world was a special preserve for the upper classes angered Lousada, and so did the stringent Victorianism of Lady Duncarrig. To him Ardclare was little better than a house of Rimmon, and he singled Georgie out as a queer little exception; some rather pathetic rebel whose consciousness was still half asleep. When he realised how the land lay between her and Clint, he was sorry for her, because he imagined her to be capable of reality. He felt that Clint was merely fooling and would certainly let the girl down, but in this he underestimated the blindness of Clint's passion once it was awakened and also the real power of Georgie's unstudied charm.

So far as he saw it, Georgie would be forsaken. He did not think very much about it at the time, as his mind was busy with other things, and the subsequent news of the marriage came to him long after the event, when he was sitting in the veranda of the Grand Bar Café in one of the narrow stifling streets of Damietta, his work having taken him to Lower Egypt. His mail had caught him up, and with it the English papers which he read with his elbows on a dirty table above the fly-haunted disorder and the hectic confusion of a native-thronged street, his eyes on the shimmering distances, the hard white roofs of Eastern houses, and avenues of acacias and mimosa trees, wildly sweet of perfume.

He was surrounded by alien colours and sounds, and yet his inward eye looked out over the dark paths of the Ardclare garden, and he saw the low heaped clouds of a grey, Irish day; he saw Georgie's lifted face quite distinctly, and the appeal of her eyes, and then he remembered Clint. The *Times* informed him that Georgie and Clint were actually married, and this was the last thing he had expected. There had been some mention of Georgie during his stay at Ardclare and he discerned the belittling touch. She was small and unimportant,

but she troubled the minds of the great, and set up irritation. Now, in the face of all this, Clint had married her; Clint, who was unusually sensitive to public opinion, and this was the strangest part of all.

Lousada watched the shining roof, in the distance, against a sky, blue, intense and passionately clear in colour, and though he did give Georgie the tribute of a passing thought, he had, it is true, not much time for her at that moment.

Then he had forgotten all about Georgie until their accidental meeting in Oxford, and something fresh and bright in her caught his attention once more. He felt that she had developed a great deal and that there was strength as well as sincerity in her influence. He was interested again, and he thought of her frequently, because he was quite sure that before long she would have either to forsake her own gods or turn her back upon Eustace Clint. It was not a situation which admitted of compromise, and soon or late Georgie would be smitten by the fierce necessity of choice. So it came as no special surprise to him to discover her again; this time alone and facing the consequences of her own decision.

Urgent political affairs swept him off again to Europe, and for months he lost touch with England; then he reappeared and took up his quarters in his drab rooms, in the harsh grey and black of London. Where was she now? he wondered, and had she given in? Clint might have triumphed, or Georgie's love for her father might have weakened her resistance. Anything might have happened in the time, and he thought a great deal of her, looking for her vaguely as he walked through the crowded streets.

In the end he discovered that she had not gone back to Clint. He was attending a huge reception, and one of the first people he met as he made his way through the drawing-room, which was thronged to suffocation, was Lady Mayfield. She glittered and shone and Lousada felt that he had never seen anyone who looked better fed and cared for; as she saw him she made a gesture of astonished delight. Lousada attracted her varying fancy and always had done so; besides, he was an authentic personality. Every one knew who he was, and people pointed him out as a celebrity.

Lady Mayfield smiled at him, and he responded.

"Well, Ulysses," she said, as they found a quiet corner. "What wave washed you up here?"

"It is a funny little coast," he replied, looking round him, "and rather crowded with beasts already."

"But *you?*" she said. "Mysterious person, where are you from? I always feel as though your pockets were full of bombs. You know so much, or so they say."

"They always tell lies—like so many of us," he remarked, looking demurely at his folded hands. "Is Clint here?"

"Somewhere or other, if he wasn't trampled to death on the staircase."

"And Mrs. Clint? How does she take to the life?"

Lady Mayfield looked at him with her clear eyes, and fluttered the soft feathers of her fan. "There has been a little row there," she said, with an appearance of candour. "Poor old Gee. You know I always liked her. She is hopelessly common and unpresentable, but there is something one likes, for all that."

"Ah, indeed?" Lousada's voice did not sound interested.

"She got her back up—I may as well tell you, though it's kept dark, and she is said to be in Ireland with that old Dada of hers; nursing him, you see, and not able to get away. Anyhow, she made a most ridiculous fuss over nothing, and cleared out." Lady Mayfield opened her eyes very wide. "Can you imagine such a thing?"

"I think I can if I try very hard."

"This is quite between ourselves." She leaned a little closer and talked confidentially. "But Eustace is as obstinate as twenty mules about it all, and it is getting serious. At first he thought she would come back at once—we all did, and so we just sat and waited."

"She didn't?"

"No, that's the odd part of it. *Then* we put the whole thing into the hands of a detective, but only after a month, and by that time the line was cold. Literally no trace of her anywhere." She shrugged her fine shoulders. "Eustace may be a widower for all we know, and Gee in Heaven. Oh, she's sure to go there, for she is so fearfully straight-laced." Nell laughed and glanced at Lousada's quiet face. "But it is awkward, isn't it? In some ways I think Eustace feels rather wretched about it, and then at other times it is a relief. If you don't know whether you are a widower or not you can't risk bigamy these days, and it is a kind of protection."

"So she is lost?" he asked, "and no one has done anything?"

"I told you we had," Lady Mayfield replied, "and I, personally, am really worried. You met her, didn't you?"

"Yes, I met her." He seemed rather bored, she thought, and then he added quickly, "I did not suppose it would work. But to leave it like this. . . . Isn't it a mistake?"

"One of those mistakes which can't be rectified. Poor old Eustace; it's dreadfully hard on him, and he does feel it. So far no one has worried, but in the end it will begin to look rather queer." She glanced at him. "I suppose you haven't met her, have you?"

"I?" Lousada's face grew blank. "My dear Lady Mayfield, I have been out of London."

"Of course, I knew that; only such queer things happen, don't they?"

Lousada stood up and looked at the crowded room, and then at Lady Mayfield's jewel-crowned head. "She struck me," he said slowly, "as being both genuine and unselfish. Two rather uncommon qualities. Didn't you think so?"

"Unselfish?" Eleanor nearly screamed. "The last, the very last word I should have used. Think of the endless trouble she has given, and Eustace is still ready to take her back. Positively. He says so. Even though he doesn't know what she may have done all this time."

"Heroic," Lousada commented dryly.

"It is heroic, though I know you don't mean it," she retorted. "After all, Georgie isn't exactly a Helen of Troy, and I think Eustace is behaving splendidly."

"Yet, I take it, it was something he did which drove her out." Lousada put his hand on the back of a gilt chair and their eyes met.

"I assure you it was *nothing*," she replied emphatically. "A silly little affair with Averil Markham. They've both forgotten it by now, and Eustace never meant anything."

"So I should have suspected," Lousada laughed, "but perhaps his wife believed in him? It is rather bewildering. In fact"—he stood up again and looked away—"it was a pretty fatal combination from the start."

Lady Mayfield grew irritated. "You are surprisingly romantic," she said, "or is it that Georgie's *beaux yeux* affect your judgment? Comerforth and several others knew something of that side of Georgie." She signed to a young man who was pushing his way towards her and turned an unrespon-

sive shoulder to Lousada, who made no further effort to continue the conversation.

A day or two later he received a letter from Georgie, and he sat for a long time thinking, when he had read it. She said very little, but if he chose to do so he could now tell Eustace Clint where he might find his wife. If Eustace was really repentant it might be better that they should put their past behind them and begin all over again. Eustace had suffered, and certainly Georgie had gone through a great deal.

Suppose he put Eustace on the track of Georgie and they made it up, what became of his own feeling that the junction was a fatal one? Now that she was out of reach, Clint believed her to be desirable once again, and yet there was no stability behind this mood. Lousada smoothed his sandy hair and lay back in a dreary looking arm-chair. He was asking himself whether there might not be some personal feeling behind his own attitude? Why should he care? So that the patch was put in the old matrimonial garment, what else mattered? The world was still a sink of hypocrisy and the conventions deadly strong. To stand between Georgie and a return to what was at least comfort, seemed inadmissible.

He recalled her small, *piquante* little face, and the restless look in her eyes. To go back to Clint unchanged in the essential principle of herself was only to go back to disaster. Her note was brief, but it contained an invitation to tea in somebody's kitchen. Lousada was not open to surprises; life had offered him too many, but he was intrigued by the idea.

"I may as well tell you first as last," she had written, "that I'm what they call a 'skivvy,' at least, that's the name the errand boys have for it. Mrs. Sandys is very nice and it's all quite good fun, but she is rather particular and would rather me not go out to meet you until she's had a look at you herself. What she'll say, goodness knows, when she does see you. So be on your best, and no *flashy ties* nor *spats*, or maybe you'll not get a ticket for the lecture."

The note she sent him exhibited the true "Georgian" spirit, and Lousada felt that he had only to look up to see her standing there. She could fling her personality across the distance and beguile him into the belief that he need only stretch out a hand to clasp her hand over the table. She was there—surely she was. Life awakened at the mere thought of her, and he began to recall her voice with its flute-like inflections, and

her astonishing way of expressing herself. Beside her, the rest of the women in the world were all dull and colourless. They chattered aimlessly, insisted upon themselves and wanted to make you believe that they, alone, were great and compelling. He knew good women and bad, and there seemed only to be really just "women"—and Georgie.

At that he got up and replaced the letter in his pocket. He intended to accept the invitation to tea. After all, Georgie was his by right of friendship, and so long as he stood as an honest friend, his own inner communings had, or need have, nothing to say to the matter. She was like fresh violets on a cool spring morning, and any man may enjoy the fragrance even if he may not lift the clean purple flowers to his lips. He felt disgusted as he thought of Clint. Clint, who had said in his hearing that he thanked his God that most Englishwomen were over-sexed; for what else, in the name of wonder, did a man want of them? Let Clint have what he might so easily find.

CHAPTER XX

LOUSADA'S reply to Georgie's letter was the first cause of any friction between her and Mrs. Sandys. They had been out together at a meeting of one of the leagues to which Mrs. Sandys belonged, and came back fagged and exhausted. Mrs. Sandys's address had not been well received, and consequently her nerves were still on edge.

The kitchen seemed cheerful and homely, as Georgie turned on the light and looked around her with a sense of comfort. Walls have a blessedness at times, and there was shelter in the little room with the red canisters along the mantelshelf and the gleaming pots and pans. A letter lay on the table, which Mrs. Sandys picked up, and when she had scrutinised the address, handed it to Georgie.

"It's from my friend," she said, flushing as she read it. "Oh, I'm awfully glad, he says he'll come to tea to-morrow."

Mrs. Sandys sat down in the creaking basket-chair while Georgie put the kettle on the gas-ring. "I am beginning to wonder if it is unwise for you to have young men to tea," she said, her Madonna face very stern and even harsh.

"He isn't a very young man," Georgie objected, "but he's awfully nice."

"What is he?" Mrs. Sandys inquired frigidly.

"I believe he's in a Government office."

"Oh, a temporary clerk, I suppose?"

"Very likely. I don't know. He's not one to talk."

"You must forgive me, Miss Desmond, but may I ask *how* you came to meet him?"

Georgie looked at the kettle. She knew perfectly well that Mrs. Sandys wished now to withdraw her permission, not because anything was really any different, but because she was filled with the commonplace desire to punish.

"I met him at a party," she said in a dull voice. "Dada and me were there, and he got me tea."

Mrs. Sandys gave a sigh of despair. "I wish you were more

open and candid," she said, and her mouth looked cruel. "Do you suppose he will ask you to marry him?"

Georgie had taken up the kettle, and she all but dropped it in her dismay at the suggestion. "Indeed, no," she said, varying the monotony of her reply. "That he will not."

"Then if his intentions are not honourable, I don't see that I ought to encourage you to see this person at all."

"Not honourable? But, Mrs. Sandys, we're *friends*." Georgie's voice rang, charged with reproach. She admired Mrs. Sandys so much and inwardly protested at the indecent stripping of her ideals. "Just as anyone might be. There's no harm in it."

"There is a very great deal of harm in a girl having men friends who may mean nothing. If, as you say, he does mean nothing, in my eyes the question becomes one of principle. You are in my charge, and I am more or less responsible for you." Mrs. Sandys took the cup of cocoa from Georgie's hands. "In your class, Miss Desmond, as you very well know, friendships of this kind are an acknowledged danger." She was speaking to Georgie's back by this time, and the atmosphere was icy cold.

"Only ladies can have friends?" Georgie asked in a voice which sounded slightly ruffled. "Is that what you mean?"

"More or less." Mrs. Sandys, having wounded, was now withdrawing from the argument. She began to feel uncomfortable and she grew flushed and uneasy. "You must not think me hard. I want to do the best for you. By the way, I did not hear his name."

"Oh, well, I s'pose it doesn't matter." Weariness and dejection spoke in every line of Georgie's small figure. She was sick at heart and hurt, and even the inspiration of anger had left her, for reaction was setting in steadily. "Anyhow, 'tis John Lousada."

"Lousada? John Lousada?" Mrs. Sandys sat up as though she had touched an electric needle. "Nonsense, Miss Desmond. Perhaps the man gave you a false name. Mr. Lousada is a *very* important person indeed; and every one knows who he is. I am afraid that this man has been deceiving you shamefully."

Georgie stood by the table and fiddled with the letter. She was doubtful as to whether she should fight the issue or not, and yet it was hard to be misjudged and to lose the one bright gift of the gods, when things were so dreary and dull already.

"His name is John," she said in the same weary voice, "and if you'll not b'lieve my word, you can read his letter."

Mrs. Sandys hesitated, but she told herself that it was her duty to probe the matter; also, being an inquisitive woman, she really wanted to know further in any case.

"If you do not mind," she said with a faint smile of reconciliation which Georgie ignored. "You see, it is the name of a man who is really well known, and if some impostor has been using it——" She took the letter and stared at the few lines written on heavily-stamped paper. It did not begin with the usual formality, but went straight ahead.

"Yes, I'll come, and gladly. I like the idea of a kitchen. As I haven't got a pair of spats you needn't feel anxious. Forgive this wretched scrawl, but a person who calls himself the Secretary for Foreign Affairs wants me to talk to him, so I must go." And the signature "John Lousada."

Mrs. Sandys looked up and drew a long breath. "I am very sorry," she said impulsively, "but you will understand, Miss Desmond, that the mistake was a natural one for me to make. You see, I know so little about you, and——" she hesitated, "your present position made it appear very improbable—don't you see?"

Georgie looked at the clock. There was something quietly comforting in its expressionless face. It told lies about the time, but that was hardly its fault. She was feeling desperately tired, and now Mrs. Sandys had offended against her own standards. She seemed to feel that it was natural to be suspicious, and right to accuse without knowledge of facts, and Georgie saw her ideal Mrs. Sandys shrivel and shrink under her eyes. She was apologising only because she was convicted of her mistake.

"Don't be distressed," Mrs. Sandys went on rapidly, "and have Mr. Lousada here. I am very busy to-morrow, but I will try to be back in time to see him."

"Very well, so," Georgie said, and her voice was sad and disconsolate. "Whatever you like yourself."

Mrs. Sandys put down her cup and wished Georgie good night, and as she undressed and prepared to get into bed, she reflected angrily on the situation. She was not really satisfied about Lousada. That he was John Lousada only added to the questionable nature of the friendship, when she considered it. Many men of public eminence were capable of intrigues, and

it was bizarre, to say the least of it, that a man who could have tea in any highly select drawing-room in London should decide to visit a pretty general servant and write her a curiously familiar note in which he mentioned "spats."

She combed out her smooth, thin hair, and her mouth contracted. A great deal would have to depend upon what Mrs. Sandys thought of Lousada when she met him, and with that she wandered from the subject to other fields, and rehearsed a speech she was due to make the following day.

As for Georgie, she was one of those who suffer on this sorrowful earth, but only for a time, and before she slept she had regained a little of her happiness. What did anybody or anything matter? Let them think of her as they pleased, let them enjoy any superiority they could extract from the fact that she was humble, poor and friendless. It would be good to see Lousada again so soon. He had a way of making you feel strong and sure of yourself. Georgie was temperamentally denied the assistance of consistent hatred. She always trusted people, and expected them to be kind; when they punished her, she eventually smiled at her chastisers, and perhaps that was one reason why she had the attraction of a child.

At any rate, she slept very peacefully under the printed words, which Mrs. Sandys frequently quoted: "The man who cannot forgive any mortal thing is a green hand in life."

CHAPTER XXI

GEORGIE put the kitchen into spick-and-span order, and refused Mrs. Sandys's offer of the sitting-room for the tea-party. She ran out and bought a bunch of flowers at the last minute, and when she looked around at the completed effect she felt satisfied.

Mrs. Sandys having shown emphatically that she desired to forget their disagreement and that she wished it forgotten, Georgie met her half-way and forgave her freely. She had "robes of joy" to wear that day, and so it was a little thing to be generous and kind.

The afternoon was cold and raw, with draperies of grey fog hanging about the chimney stacks of the high buildings beyond the windows. The wet pavements and the streets were dingy and grey, and people who passed looked as though they were a string of hopeless pilgrims driven onwards to some unwished-for goal. But in Georgie's eyes they were transfigured, and she felt that in spite of the dreary effect of everything, happiness abounded, because she herself was happy. If it had been Miss White or Milson Rogers who was coming, quite probably she would have been even happier, and if Dada had been the expected guest, her radiance alone would have lighted the room without need of Mrs. Sandys's electricity. As it was, Lousada was coming, and with a full sense of the fun of the thing, Georgie put on her cap and apron and awaited him, her eyes on the clock.

He was punctual to the moment, and Georgie ran to the door and admitted him, her heart beating fast as she watched him hang up his coat and hat, and then he turned and shook hands again with her, very limply, as was his wont.

"Your fancy dress suits you," he said, nodding appreciatively and he followed her into the kitchen and sat down in Mrs. Sandys's basket-chair.

"Glory! It's something to see a man again," Georgie remarked as she took the kettle from the hob and warmed the tea-pot. "Are you starving, or will I wait to wet the tea?"

"I'm starving," he replied. "And how long is it since we met? By the way, do I call you Miss Desmond?"

"You might even go so far as to call me Georgie," she said, tilting her head on one side.

"And my name is John," he looked at her steadily. "Am I to be so far favoured as to hear you use it?"

"Now and then, for a treat," she agreed, and sat down by the table. "And I hear that you are no end of a swell, and that all the duchesses in London are mad after you?"

Lousada smiled to himself. "Who has been giving me away?" he asked.

"The missus. Mrs. Sandys, that is. She's dead nuts on you, and is coming home in time to gaze at your face."

"Is she, indeed?" he moved and crossed his legs, "and she is good to you?"

"Oh, yes."

"And *why*—no, I mustn't ask that, must I? The individual right of action is divine. For some reason or other you are here, and do you remain here?"

For a moment Georgie's face grew fiercely tragic, and she sat blinking her eyelids before she replied, "D'you b'lieve in looking ahead?" she asked. "After all, it's what is up to us at this living minute which counts. If we were to go prophesying it might take us to the last Seal in the Revelations."

"Philosopher," he said. "Am I allowed to smoke?"

"Smoke away," she agreed. "I'll have one myself."

"We had got to the last Seal in Revelations," he reminded her when she had lighted a cigarette.

"What I mean is, 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,'" Georgie continued more calmly, "and to go borrow trouble never got the lame tinker a new coat. I was in a bad way before I went into service, and yet I suppose we all of us must pay when we want something out of the ordinary." She cast down her eyes and thought for a moment. "We had a row, Eustace and myself, and I cleared out."

Lousada made no answer. There was only the dim light coming through the windows of the small room, and the fitful leaping of the fire showing through the close bars of the range, so that his face was in a heavy shadow, and revealed nothing of his thoughts.

"I dare say you and many another might think I was hard on Eustace, and there's times when I get bothered about it myself;

but what I thought was reason enough at the time, is reason enough yet, and so there it is"; again she paused as though she expected him to speak, but he said nothing. "Dada doesn't know," she continued, "no one does except Eustace, Nell, and one other, and they've left it at that. It's hard to have the world against you, John, but it toughens you finely."

"Martyr," he said softly. "Authentic Irishwoman. "I felt you would do something of the kind."

"Martyrs be hanged." She got up and took down a red canister from the mantelpiece. "I'm well, and not too badly off. Mrs. Sandys is no end of a clever woman, and she talks most beautifully."

"I hope she acts up to her oratory?"

"Indeed, yes." Georgie counted the number of teaspoons as she measured out the tea. "Grand."

"Do you intend to remain here for ever, Georgie?"

"Oh, you and your for evers! What is for ever, at all? I might get run over by a train or a motor-bicycle, and then where would 'for ever' be?"

"But if you do not?" he leaned forward and touched her. "Do be a shade less improvident. If you can make it up with Clint, mightn't it be best?"

She drew a long sighing breath and occupied herself again with the teapot.

"I loved Eustace," she said. "That's true. When I married I was cracked about him, and now I'm going to tell you something that's against myself, I s'pose. After a bit," she sat down in front of the tea-tray, "I began to find either himself or myself was different. In England I wasn't as much of a success as I expected. Vanity, of course you'll say, and it's true. Not that I'd mind that very much, but what I did mind was that *Eustace* minded. It sounds very muddled, but you'll understand me, Mr. Lousada."

"I'll try to, Miss Desmond."

"I am his wife, John," she continued, "and I know him through and through, but I admit it hurt me. D'you suppose that I'd have cared? Did I care what Milson and all the rest of them said of Eustace?"

"I don't suppose you did," he said dryly.

"Not that all of this matters, man alive," Georgie spoke cheerfully. "It's all by way of explanation. What did matter

was something I can't be repeating, even to you—it broke things up between us for good and all."

He thought he heard a stifled sob in her voice, and when he replied his voice was harsh. "I recommend reconciliation," he said briefly. "Patch it up. A stitch in time, Georgie, and all that kind of thing. You can't go on being a general servant, and Eustace Clint will sweep down upon you sooner or later and make his own appeal. Let me be honest. I met Lady Mayfield lately, and she says that his affair with some girl or other is over, and that he has been trying to find you. Will that knowledge alter your judgments?"

Georgie sprang up and turned on the light, flooding the room with the clear, uncompromising hardness of a strong electric bulb tempered only by a white china shade. She looked pale, but her eyes were bright and her mouth firm.

"Is it go back? Go back on myself and what I believe?" she asked. "You to put such a question? If I left Eustace for a reason, what's happened since to change everything? He's tired of Miss Markham and she of him? More shame to the both of them. He wants to find me? Why? Because it's queer to have your wife missing. I can't let Eustace free, because I don't hold with ending a marriage at all; and having made a mess of things, good Lord, John, I'm not so cowardly as to run home on the first whistle, even if I am a servant girl."

Lousada sat watching her with a whimsical look in his eyes, and then put his hands above his head. "I surrender," he said. "Kamerade."

"And now I'll give you a cup of tea." Georgie was breathing hard. "Surely I'm growing very quarrelsome, John."

Lousada stirred his tea thoughtfully. "I think you're a foreigner," he said, glancing at her sideways. "Clint ought not to have married you. Only a very exceptional Englishman should ever dare to marry an Irishwoman. On the other hand, Englishwomen are quite satisfactory as wives for the Irish. I don't understand it myself."

The subject of marriage always interested Georgie, and she started off full tilt. She cited the facts as known to herself, and how, on the appearance of a British regiment at Cork, marriages had followed like a crop of mushrooms. English regiments carried off hosts of Irish girls, who returned on visits, Anglicised and altered so that they looked very nearly English,

and why, then, was she herself such a deplorable exception to the rule?

"You're a strange being," he said when she paused at last. "A kind of green cocktail. I wish I knew what to say to you, but I don't."

"I'll not go back on what I believe," she said firmly.

"So I gather. Advice is no use. But what next, Georgie? What, in the name of wisdom, are you going to do?"

She shook her head and made no reply for some time. She seemed to Lousada to have drawn away into some dim starlit place of her soul, where she received comfort.

"D'you know," she said with a sudden laugh of amusement, "the young man from the grocery store asked me to marry him? What do you think of that?"

Lousada handed her his cup. "Half, this time, and not too strong. I think he showed his good taste, even if it was rather hopeless. The desire of the moth for the star."

"It helped me along," she said frankly. "Bad luck on him, of course, but sometimes I feel as if I mattered to no one, and was like a football, kicked here and there by one and another. I'd not like to grow hardened, but you get hard in the end."

"I admire your pluck, but it's very expensive," he remarked. "I wish, Georgie Desmond, that I could speak my own heart out to you. Am I forbidden to do so?"

"It depends on what's inside in it," she said nervously. "You see, you and I are good friends, John, and I'm a married woman. If what you have to say isn't any way personal, say it out."

"But I'm afraid it is," he looked at her again, "so I will keep it to myself. Only I warn you, I've done my duty about Clint, and I'm not a hero. I can't promise to push his claim any further."

"That's between him and me," she moved restlessly, and the bell of the outer door rang. "Glory! Who's that now?" She got to her feet. "I'd love you to listen to me show them in," she laughed. "It's as good as a play."

Smoothing her apron and tidying her hair, she left the kitchen with a parting wink at Lousada, who tiptoed to the door and watched her cross the small hall.

As she opened the front door she stepped back quickly, as Mrs. Clint stood, ponderous and dignified, on the threshold.

"Is Mrs. Sandys at home?" she asked.

"No." Georgie's voice was subdued and hardly audible.

"When is she expected back?"

"Not until late."

Mrs. Clint made an exclamation of annoyance, and opening a capacious bag, took out a card. She seemed in doubt of mind, and peered at Georgie, who had retreated behind the door into shelter. Mrs. Clint was evidently going to say something further, but at that moment Mrs. Sandys herself came quickly along the passage and greeted her with great enthusiasm.

"Mrs. Clint, what a fortunate accident that I should get in in time to see you."

Leaving them together, Georgie fled back to the kitchen, her face flaming and her whole small person alive with excitement.

"What'll I do, whatever will I do, John?" she asked in a whisper. "Mrs. Sandys is sure and certain to ring for the tea, and then she'll spot me. Isn't it awful? The awf'lest thing that could have happened."

"Don't let us lose our heads," Lousada said, smiling at her. "I'll bring in the tea-tray. You can cut your finger or something. How would that be?"

A second later, when Mrs. Sandys came into the kitchen, she found Lousada binding up Georgie's wrist with a handkerchief. He looked up at Mrs. Sandys and explained solemnly that there had been a small accident.

"May I carry in the tray?" he asked, watching her carefully.

"I wish Mrs. Clint had chosen another evening," Mrs. Sandys said in dejected tones. "I was looking forward to having a little talk with you. You and Miss Desmond are old friends. How very nice."

She now felt sure that Lousada was, like herself, a socialist, which explained his simple friendship with a girl of decent parentage who had become a domestic helper, so she patted Georgie's shoulder before she followed him out of the kitchen.

"I shall see to the cut myself, later on," she said.

"She'll catch us out over the cut," Georgie said, as Lousada came back. "That's as true as you're here. You needn't be leaving yet, need you?"

He looked at the clock. "I should go, but I'm not going," he replied. "Can't you come out to dinner some evening, Georgie? Or lunch?"

"I don't know if I can; but I will," she said defiantly. "Will you reely have tea with Mrs. Sandys?"

"Certainly," he said. "I must get on with her. It is one of the moves in the game. If I am to see you, I have to make friends with her."

Georgie looked very small and defenceless as she stood by the kitchen table, and all of a sudden John Lousada's whole being revolted against her fate. He longed to snatch her from the surroundings in which she was placed, and to break her pathetic refusal and sweep her into warmth and love once more. Not Clint's love, with its faithlessness and condescension, but his own real love for her. For her sake he must keep his feelings to himself and prevent her guessing anything. She had the kind of courage which, if called upon, would exile him from her, and there was such a desperate battle attached even to their friendship that he must not spoil her happiness. Just then her eyes were eloquent. The whole of her heart rose up and looked out through them, and she smiled wistfully.

"It's been grand to see you," she said. "And I'll manage so's Mrs. Sandys can't doctor my wrist until morning, and by then she'll have forgotten it. I couldn't face Mrs. Clint. You don't think me cowardly, do you?"

"No, I don't," he replied. "But I'm not pretending I like this arrangement of yours, Georgie; sooner or later there will be a smash and, somehow, I feel it may come through me. That is what I hate."

"They can't kill me," Georgie laughed gallantly. "If Mrs. Sandys sends me to Jerusalem in a ham basket itself, I don't lose my life over it."

"*Au revoir*," he said, as their hands touched.

In the drawing-room Mrs. Sandys was explaining to Mrs. Clint that the man who carried in the tray was no less a person than John Lousada. Mrs. Clint had never heard of him, so she was totally unimpressed, but she was curious to know why he was in the kitchen. She had an exact memory, and was interested in the servant question. Mrs. Sandys was irritated to find her guest indifferent to the dramatic announcement she had made, and found herself under close cross-examination as to her reasons for allowing her general servant to entertain single men.

"I cannot sufficiently impress upon you," Mrs. Clint said in tones of stern disapproval, "the danger of your own attitude. It really surprises me that you should permit such a thing. I only caught a glimpse of the girl, as she practically hid behind the

door. If her conscience had been clear, why should she have hidden?"

"I can't see——" Mrs. Sandys began weakly.

"Well, I can. Oh, my dear Katherine, be a little more worldly. You are out all day, and what do you know of the conduct which goes on in your absence? All servants are alike. I very definitely suspect this man of immoral intentions, and I assure you that I never trust any girl in my own employment. It is *fatal*."

"You are so sweeping," Mrs. Sandys objected. "Miss Desmond is a good girl. I am sure of that."

"Desmond?" Mrs. Clint looked like a thunder-cloud. "That name has painful associations for me." She paused and thought, and then appeared serene again. "If she is at all like a Miss Desmond I once knew of, I pity you." She chewed the cud of her memories for a moment, during which time Mrs. Sandys argued on the abstract morality of the domestic helper.

"My advice to you," Mrs. Clint looked at her hostess with eyes not at all unlike those of her son, "is to keep a strict watch upon her."

Mrs. Sandys felt that there was an episcopal awfulness in the voice and manner of Mrs. Clint, and, as she was temperamentally nervous, she became alarmed.

"Well," she said dejectedly, "this makes the prospect of a visit from Angela Dubarry more of an infliction than I had expected it to be. I heard from her this morning."

"Angela Dubarry? Cousin of Lady Duncarrig, and granddaughter of the late Earl?" Mrs. Clint asked. She was well up in the peerage, and her gloom lifted slightly.

"Yes," Mrs. Sandys agreed. She was not sorry that Mrs. Clint should know that. "She is a connection of my husband's."

Mrs. Clint collected her many wrappings, and prepared to leave, and as she fastened her furs around her neck a thought struck her. "May I ask you to ring for your maid?" she said.

"Certainly," Mrs. Sandys replied.

"Because," Mrs. Clint said with a kind of saintly roguishness, "if I am right in my suspicions, she will make an excuse not to appear."

"I think you are hard on her." Mrs. Sandys rang the bell.

"My own feeling for her is that she is quite truthful, even if not very intelligent. She is impulsive and ill-advised, but no worse."

Mrs. Clint held her peace and waited, but no answer came.

"I will go and see." Mrs. Sandys broke from the tension of the moment. "Really you are wrong, and not only wrong, but unfair to the girl." But when she returned once more and stood before Mrs. Clint, it was obvious that she was both distressed and puzzled, and that her faith was shaken.

"Tell me nothing," Mrs. Clint said with great majesty. "I wish to know nothing. All I ask is, that you should so far safeguard yourself as to keep a watch upon her."

"I am so busy," Mrs. Sandys said, glancing round the room. "My public claims are so many. She is quite honest and upright, and as for Mr. Lousada, I cannot believe that there is *anything* wrong between them. You have very much distressed me, Mrs. Clint."

She let Mrs. Clint out into the world again, and stood in the hall reflecting uncomfortably on her words. Mrs. Clint had all the success which follows upon any adviser of violent or direct action. She always called upon her hearers to uphold a marching cause. She had thrilled mass meetings of Friendly Girls during the war, by demanding that armies should march into Berlin, and now she had challenged Mrs. Sandys to vindicate her general servant, with what appeared to be a kind of secret knowledge which coloured and strengthened her suspicions. Some Miss Desmond, known to her, was a renegade and an outlaw, and the resemblance between her name and Georgie's was distinctly ominous.

Georgie was washing up in the scullery, and Mrs. Sandys avoided the kitchen for the rest of the evening. There might be some truth in what Mrs. Clint had said. Mrs. Clint's tremendous faith in the wickedness of human nature had a way of turning up as a winning number, and one could not entirely ignore it. So she avoided Georgie, and did not ask her about her wrist. Lousada had impressed her quite favourably, and she was anxious to see him again. It would be pleasant to allude to his visits to the flat, and from that she went on to think of Angela Dubarry.

Angela was no longer exactly a girl, and she spent much of her time visiting among relations. That she should have in-

vited herself to Mrs. Sandys's flat only meant that she wanted to fill up a vacant space in her own arrangements, and as they were antagonistic in politics, Mrs. Sandys did not care for the prospect. Still, whoever came or went, she must attend meetings and be present at councils, and Angela could look after herself.

Before she went to bed, she felt extremely sorry for Georgie, and she opened the kitchen door to wish her good night. Georgie was sitting at the table, her head propped between her hands, looking steadily in front of her, but as she did not turn or look up, Mrs. Sandys altered her decision and slipped away without speaking. Georgie had seemed uncannily detached; her profile was pale and lifted, almost as though she were praying, and for a second Mrs. Sandys obtained an impression of having seen a glimpse of her domestic helper's soul. There had been pathos in the sight, and delicacy, and the truth, which only suffering brings to people. Was it possible to see the inner spirit, in one flash like this? Mrs. Sandys was uncomfortable and distressed as she withdrew. The world with its righteous Mrs. Clints was such a puzzling place, because Mrs. Clint was never candid, and even plumed herself on her wiliness. Mrs. Sandys very nearly wept as she put on her dressing-gown and wove her hair into two long, thin plaits. She envied the assurance of Mrs. Clint, and her way of quoting the Scriptures so aptly; she had an impregnable defence line, and only believed in the Peerage. Once you forsook this simple plan, and placed your faith in anyone who appeared honest, you got into conflict and difficulties, and found things out about the very people you championed.

What a world! Mrs. Sandys suffered horribly from doubt of mind, but then, she always had done so. When she had been a devout adherent of the High Church movement, she had felt there was much to be said for Non-conformists, and when she had become a Roman Catholic, she fell a prey to agnosticism; now that she was a free-thinker, the chief trouble she had was disbelief in revealed religions, and so she was also a spiritualist, which phase had begun in her during the weeks when she was a declared atheist. Between the strong determination of Mrs. Clint, and the vague possibilities of vice in the heart and nature of Georgie, she was again driven and tossed like a mist wraith in a storm. She did not know what she believed, or what she

felt. One thing only she was sure of, and that was that John Lousada had "nice eyes." She never read popular fiction, or her own description might have put her on her guard, but she felt that it was wise and highly diplomatic, to ask him to call on her again at an early date.

CHAPTER XXII

FOR some days after Lousada's visit, the feeling in the flat was one of strain. Georgie was not sure what was wrong with her. She suffered from a sense of *malaise* and a weary restlessness which was foreign to her nature. Her happiness had deserted her, or came only in snatches like a bird resting for a moment to sing, and then flying away again. Mrs. Sandys said nothing unkind, but she was furtive, and patchy in her temper, so that the old calm was gone, and in its stead there was a brooding hint of coming storm.

Georgie had intended to ask permission to take an evening off to dine with Lousada, but in the face of the queer and disconcerting silence of Mrs. Sandys, she hesitated, and finally took French leave, dining with him in a quiet little restaurant on the Chelsea Embankment, and returning before Mrs. Sandys got back from one of her endless meetings. Perhaps it was deceitful; Georgie was not sure, but after all it had been worth it and the enjoyment of the two hours meant a great deal. She believed that she and Lousada were only friends, and with a fixed stoicism, decided to ignore the fact that she was not quite so sure of this as she might have been a month or two ago.

Life is hard enough in any case without adding to its difficulties, and a sense of self-protection made her shrink from analysing her own motives too closely. She temporised and told herself that nothing mattered so long as they kept along the uncertain pathways of friendship. She had her own knowledge of men to help her, and her heart informed her that Lousada cared a very great deal. In Georgie's loneliness it may be forgiven her that she clung with closed eyes to the only comfort she had in her life. She was so young still, and the pleasures of youth were most of them denied to her. The circle of her days was close and narrow, and there was nothing to look forward to.

In endeavouring, first of all, to act faithfully by Mrs. Sandys, she had only induced an inquisitorial attitude on the part of her mistress, and suffered under her cross-examination. To tell

her nothing was far simpler, and Georgie felt pleasure in having eaten secret bread. She had flung away the toil of the weeks and laughed and talked with Lousada, almost the old Georgie Desmond once more, and he had been as gay as she. The evening had been as harmless as a children's party. Must she bring it to the cold confessional, and stand listening while Mrs. Sandys implied that there was some evil behind it all, which would harm and destroy her own memories? She decided against doing this, and Lousada agreed that she was right.

"It's no affair of hers," he said. "She has written to me, Georgie, and asked me to tea. Will you be invited?"

"Glory! I don't know," Georgie laughed. "It depends on what mood she is in. And that depends on who she's been speaking to last. It's awfully queer the way she can't know her own mind at all, isn't it, now?"

"Perhaps she hasn't a real mind," he suggested. "That would account for a great deal."

"She's awfully clever," Georgie said with admiring conviction. "Knows such a heap about life and all that."

"I'd rather know what I thought myself," he commented briefly.

He had accepted Mrs. Sandys's invitation, and yet Mrs. Sandys did not speak of it to Georgie. She said nothing, in fact, about Lousada, but made it known to Georgie that she was expecting a guest, a relative by marriage, Miss Angela Dubarry, who was rather a "special" person. So special indeed, that Mrs. Sandys fussed considerably about the tiny spare bedroom and had the curtains cleaned. A Socialist herself, as she repeated emphatically, she was obliged to admit that her husband's kinswoman was from realms whither the ordinary mortal did not penetrate. Georgie listened, a prey to discomfort once more. Surely she remembered Angela Dubarry? She was one of those great and superior people who stayed at Ardclare. Not at all often, it was true, and fear of detection there was none, because Georgie had only seen her in church. But she knew, and her heart told her, that Angela would be a foe. She was a beauty who had reached the past tense, and suffered from a calm rancour towards others.

Having no status other than that of a poor relation, she went her well-bred way from house to house, leaving an uncomfortable sensation behind her, though Georgie knew nothing at all of this. In her eyes she had only looked a faded star,

and she recalled the composure of Miss Dubarry's face as she sat in the Duncarrigs' pew, ignoring every one but God, with positive rudeness. Yes, that was it. Angela was on good terms with God, as well as several dukes, and it made her tremendously distant. Her dark hair and haughty features, her look of starved aloofness, and her reputation for intense goodness, made her alarming when you thought of her in the flat.

Mrs. Sandys, after all, was a human being, who suffered from varying moods and fitful passions, but Angela was one of the immortals who was above all this. You thought of her in marble halls or travelling to the nearest palace, and at the notion of such a visitor Georgie felt nervous and anxious.

"Will we want the dinner late?" she asked, and Mrs. Sandys frowned and looked at the fire.

"I don't see that I need put myself out," she said, though the question really affected Georgie and not her. "She has asked herself here. I'm delighted to have her," she added quickly. "She is no trouble at all. Perhaps if we added soup——?"

"Very well," Georgie agreed. "But no joint?"

"Joint? Certainly not. Miss Dubarry won't stay long, I think. Her visit to Lord and Lady Oxhey had to be put off on account of illness. It is always a great pleasure to have her."

The day before Angela was due to arrive, Georgie met Lousada at a tea shop in the King's Road, and they sat in a crowded room and looked at one another over the round table.

"I *hate* your doing this kind of thing," he said. "It's no use my pretending I don't. I believe I know Miss Dubarry. You aren't lucky in these matters."

"I've seen her in th' Ardclare pew," Georgie said with a shrug of her shoulders. "After all, John, I'm the dust under her feet, so she could leave me alone. Perhaps she'll give me a tip, and we'll go on the spree out of it."

"I wish you'd be reasonable. I wish you'd come and look after me instead. I'd take a flat—I mean this seriously, Georgie—and not even call, if you said you wouldn't have me there. Just somewhere to put my books and all the things that are stored and costing a fortune to keep. Why can't I do that?"

"Because I'll not," she said stubbornly. "It's very kind of you, but it's not any use. I'm well placed as it is."

"You are simply incorrigibly self-willed," he said.

"It's as well for me that I am," she retorted, and there seemed no answer to such an obvious truth, because Lousada himself always emphasised the fact that people who didn't know their own minds were indeed contemptible.

The week before the arrival of Angela had been a happy one, and Georgie set to, to get everything ready for Miss Dubarry with the energy of good-will. She was a whole-hearted worker, just as she was genuine in all other respects, and it gave her a sense of pleasure to make the spare room look its best. It wasn't much of a room, and her pride in the flat made her wish that it looked better. She bought a small bunch of anemones, which made a gay spot of colour on the dressing-table. From her dim recollections of Miss Dubarry she suspected her of a capacity for scorn, and then, the surroundings she was used to in great houses must be in vigorous contrast to the small resources of Mrs. Sandys's flat. But she was prepared to admire all that was dignified and impressive in the expected guest, and, besides, Angela had sat in the church at Ardclare and listened to Dada's sermons more than once.

Georgie snatched a few minutes to herself, and met Lousada at the corner of King's Road the morning of the day upon which Miss Dubarry was to arrive. He was coming to tea with Mrs. Sandys on the following day, but on this point Mrs. Sandys had been dumb, so that Georgie suspected her of having no intention that Lousada and she should meet. It seemed a little unkind, but she did not wish to form rash judgments, and she laughed as she gave him a vivid description of the way in which she would announce him, and bring in the tea-tray.

"It won't do for me to flicker an eyelid," she said as they leaned on the Embankment wall and watched the river craft go by. "I'll have to keep a straight face, and not give a glance at you, John! 'Twould be as much as my place is worth."

"And what in the world do I do?" he inquired. "Am I to sit there like a graven image and let you wait on me? It's going past a joke, Georgie. Do try and see your way to sanity. Don't you understand, you child, that I may be sent away again; and to leave you here so friendless and alone is miserable. Surely our friendship makes it possible for me to do something to protect you?"

"I had a lovely letter from Dada this morning," she said, avoiding any answer to his words. "He's as happy as can be. The Bishop came down and gave an address at the school

house, and Miss White had a fortune left her by an aunt. A hundred pounds a year! I'm as pleased as if it had happened to myself. There's been no botheration over the Sustentation Fund at all, and the Duns are coming back. Oh, whatever will I do if it gets around to Dada that Eustace and I are out for good?" Her face grew sad and troubled. "D'you think they'd be as mean as to tell on me?"

"I do think so," Lousada said bluntly. "Sooner or later they will know. Clint will pose as an injured husband. You are playing with dynamite, as I have told you before."

"What is there I could do?" she asked wretchedly.

"Tell your father the truth. You can't treat him like a child for ever. Why should he not know?"

"Oh, I can't, I can't," Georgie protested.

"But you can. If you don't, he will hear it from some one else."

"I couldn't bear that he'd be worried." Georgie blew her nose loudly. "It would kill him to know."

"People don't die so easily as all that," he said shortly.

"I'm doing no harm to anyone, and I've got honest work," she said, defending her own position with some heat. "What's the harm in that, can you tell me? As for Eustace, if he tries to get me back, I'll not come," she raised her eyes to Lousada's face. "Mind, if he'd been true, I'd have stayed with him to the finish, even if I'd not been able to love him as I did at the start. But he was false; so false that I'd not b'lieve his oath"; she turned and looked at the swiftly-flowing water below them. "He seemed to think that *things* were enough. Just to give me a present, and no more be said. What I gave him was what money'd not buy, and he threw it back at me. He hurt me badly, and I couldn't care any more for him, nor ever can, whatever the world has to say."

"Perhaps you ask too much of him?" Lousada smiled at her averted face. "You are a Victorian, Georgie, out of your element in these modern days. You don't understand Clint's point of view, though we agreed it was Oriental, didn't we?" He paused, but she did not turn her head, and he guessed that she was struggling to hold back tears. He touched her arm lightly. "Face the possibility of the whole thing becoming known, and make your own preparations. Mrs. Sandys may not side with you."

"She may not, indeed," Georgie agreed.

"That means eviction. The world, as you call it, Georgie, has to be faced once more. Come out of your romantic castle, and cut your possible losses. Or is it that you don't trust me away down in your heart?"

"I do. B'lieve me, I do," she said huskily.

"Then why not agree to my plan? The flat, with some elderly and bad-tempered woman there to keep you from being too comfortable or happy, and your conscience clear. The security of being in the house of some one who knows the whole story through and through. And, after all, you like me a little, don't you? Better than Mrs. Sandys?"

Georgie turned towards him, and her face was flooded with colour. There was a touch of impetuosity in the movement of her hands, and her eyes implored him dumbly. The appeal in them startled him, and he felt for the moment as though her spirit had rushed through to him and that he held her in some sense which was limitlessly stronger than the clasp of arms or the touch of lips to lips.

"'Twould be a poor thing for me to lie to you, John," she said. "And so I'll speak out. It's because I'm not really all the friend I'd like best to be, and I *can't* take nothing from you. That's the way."

He was silent for a very long time before he answered her.

"It's no secret, then," he said at last. "And we both know. I don't see that we need be ashamed that it has come to honest avowal. Does it really rule me out? Am I to stand aside only because I'd give you all I have? I'll never speak of it again—I mean this, Georgie—it's not tall talk—you are free of protestations from me, and I think you know this."

"You see, I'm Eustace Clint's wife," she said dully. "If I didn't care a rap for you, perhaps I might go, though it's hard for me to say, because—well, least said's soonest mended." She awoke from her lethargy at the striking of a neighbouring clock. "Glory! I'll be late as it is, and the luncheon not ready." She glanced at him shyly, and though he besought her to give him five minutes longer, she would not stay, and he watched her until she vanished out of sight.

Miss Dubarry was not due to arrive until late in the afternoon and Mrs. Sandys sacrificed herself on the altar of kinship so far as to return to her flat half an hour before her visitor was due. She had already got to the stage of feeling that Angela was to be a charge and a care, and she was fretful and

out of temper with Georgie, who, by this time, had learnt that a general servant makes a good subject upon whom to visit pent up irritations due to remote causes. Whenever Mrs. Sandys was put out by some occurrence at a committee meeting, Georgie was the sufferer, and so she accepted the veiled complaints made in a querulous tone as one accepts the rain or snow in its season.

At five o'clock Miss Dubarry arrived, and she and Mrs. Sandys greeted one another with much effusion. From the kitchen Georgie listened to the meeting and waited until the preliminaries were concluded, to carry in the tea-tray. Miss Dubarry was sitting in the best chair, her dressing-case and an attaché case beside her, and she looked, so Georgie thought, very regal and composed. She was talking with slow emphasis of a bazaar she had just left, which had been opened by a princess, and the reflected glamour of royalty still hung around her. Already Mrs. Sandys was restless, for Angela monopolised the whole conversation, and she glanced at Georgie as she put down the tray, and broke in upon Miss Dubarry's recitation, to suggest that her bag might be removed to her room, where the rest of her luggage was already placed. "Miss Desmond will take your bag," she said, in her nervous way, and then, speaking to Georgie, she went on, "Will you please take Miss Dubarry's bag to her room?"

Georgie turned in time to catch the elevation of Angela's eyebrows, and her prim, condescending smile of amused scorn, but she seemed to object to the idea, and shook her head. "I am prepared to look after myself," she said. "When one is in Bohemia, dear Katherine, one does as the Bohemians do."

"If you want me to take it, I'll take it," Georgie said willingly. "Will I put a match to the gas, Mrs. Sandys? The room is a little cold, I fancy." She hoped Mrs. Sandys would agree, and looked at her imploringly. What would Miss Dubarry say afterwards about the flat, if she had just complaints to make? There was something in "the cut" of Angela that spoke volumes of critical possibilities.

Miss Dubarry extracted a bunch of keys from her bag. "Kindly unpack my trunk," she said stiffly, holding them out to Georgie. "I will see to my dressing-bag myself."

"Would you *like* a fire, Angela?" Mrs. Sandys asked. "The room is very small, and soon gets like an oven . . . still, if you would care to have the gas stove lighted——?"

"Please," Miss Dubarry replied firmly, and Georgie withdrew. "Did you call that girl 'Miss Desmond'?" Angela asked when she had gone. "The modern idea, I suppose?"

"She is Irish," Mrs. Sandys replied as she poured out tea. "Careless and untidy, but I like her very much."

Again Angela's eyebrows went upwards. "I thought I recognised a brogue," she said. "How funny that you should have happened on a servant from there."

"She isn't quite a servant." Mrs. Sandys handed a plate of bread and margarine. "Superior, I think. Her father is a Presbyterian minister."

Angela was not in the least interested. She wanted to talk of what she had done at Lady Northmoor's sale of work, and the letters she had written, for she also lent herself to many organisations.

"I had great difficulty in getting the Duke to come," she said, taking up the thread of her conversation where it had been abruptly cut short. "At three o'clock the day before, when everything was settled, Charles Forty, his secretary, came and told me that it was impossible. He said, 'Angela, my dear, I've done all that man can do, and His Grace won't budge unless you can induce Lady Rosemary to look in, even for five minutes.' So you can imagine what *that* meant. I was a whole hour at the telephone before I could get on to Rosemary Dallas, and when I did she made all sorts of difficulties. It was quite late by that time, and Octavia Northmoor was in despair. I don't, even now, know how I *did* it, Katherine, but Rosemary said she would come, just for five minutes only, as she was so fearfully busy. I rang off, and Octavia felt that I ought to lie down, but as time was pressing and I was still uneasy, I rang up Charles Forty. It appears that he was just going out, so I was all but too late. When I got on to him and told him that Rosemary had agreed to come, he said, 'You wonder,' and then he went on to speak to the Duke. I was dreadfully anxious about it. You see, it had been run so fine, but imagine my relief when Charles spoke again and said, 'It's all right. He'll be there!' We had quite a brilliant success, and as I was taking all the responsibility, you can guess what a demand it made on me."

She paused to drink some tea, and Mrs. Sandys charged wildly into the conversational gap. "But why was it necessary for Lady Rosemary Dallas to go?" she asked.

Angela seemed to inquire within herself whether one could tell Mrs. Sandys or not, and then decided to beg the question. "That is rather a long story," she replied.

"Oh, don't trouble to tell me. I know nothing of society scandals," Mrs. Sandys replied quickly. "I am, as you know, a Socialist."

"I know you say you are one, dear." Angela's glance travelled round the room. "Have you ever thought what Campion would have felt about it?"

"Certainly." Mrs. Sandys coloured up. "I had a message through from him. Mr. Prence, a great friend of mine, is a wonderful medium, and during the time when I was studying spiritualism, was a great help. Campion said most emphatically that those who had passed over were all Socialists on the other side."

Miss Dubarry smiled resignedly, and for once said nothing. She knew that she was conferring a favour on her hostess and that her relative by marriage was in a different social sphere. She felt that her cursory glance round her bedroom had not promised any great comfort, and she was sure that the bed was hard, but for the moment she prepared herself to make the best of it, as though it was a billet about the occupation of which there was very little personal choice. Until the Oxheys were able to have her she must stay with Mrs. Sandys.

Octavia Northmoor had not responded to the hints she had scattered as to a further stay in her house in Park Street, so she had impressed every one she met with her sense of duty in going to the wilds of Chelsea to befriend and console a relative by marriage. Angela had a reputation for kindness which she attended to carefully, and even believed in herself. At last she got up to go to her room. "Do I call the maid 'Miss—' what is it?"

"If you don't mind, Angela dear. You see, servants are so hard to get, and so difficult to keep if you do get them. And, after all, I don't see any reason why . . ."

"Of course, if it is the rule," Angela replied. "Can I ring for her if I want her, and will she brush my clothes?"

"If you ask her, I'm sure she will," Mrs. Sandys said with a stifled sigh.

"What time do you dine, Katherine? I take about half an hour."

"We don't—I mean, I don't have late dinner. Just a light meal, and please don't dress."

"I think I would rather, if I may," Miss Dubarry said pointedly. "It is so much more comfortable, isn't it?" and she walked to the door. Mrs. Sandys heard her cross the little passage, and almost at once the register in the kitchen informed Georgie that Miss Dubarry required her assistance.

Turning down her sleeves and washing her hands under the tap, she went quickly to answer the bell.

CHAPTER XXIII

GEORGIE was full of admiration for Angela as she fastened her gauzy evening dress, and stood to look at the result of over half an hour's attendance. The dress had been a gift from Octavia Northmoor, and fitted Miss Dubarry quite well. She had spoken very little to Georgie, except to give orders, but her admiration was so pleasantly spontaneous that Angela thawed slightly, and asked her what part of Ireland she came from. It was an awkward question to answer, and, with a decision which was born out of unconsidered impulse, Georgie replied that she came from Belfast.

"You speak with a strong Cork accent," Miss Dubarry remarked pointedly; "but perhaps you have lived in the south?"

Forced into explanation, and with a dreadful fear that Miss Dubarry would inevitably meet Lady Duncarrig and "tell on her," Georgie again took liberties with the facts, and explained carefully that she had an aunt in Crosshaven who used to invite her there in her youth, so she had caught the local inflection. The traditions of Ardclare still lingered persistently in her mind, and Georgie believed that she was, as of old, "the talk of the world." Had she stuck to the truth, it is very unlikely that Miss Dubarry would have given her another thought, but the egotism from which most mortals suffer led her into the path of danger. As it was, Angela discerned untruthfulness, and looked at her with cold scrutiny. She unbent so far as to tell Georgie that she also came from Ireland, and recited a short and brilliant list of the names of her own connections in that country, more from force of habit than any other reason. Georgie was the merest of mere servants, and beyond harbouring the suspicion that she was a liar, which argued that she had something to hide, Miss Dubarry was not interested in her.

Mrs. Sandys, changing her blouse for a jumper in her own room, was agitated and depressed. If Angela wanted to be waited upon she should have gone to an hotel. It was too bad to come to a tiny establishment and run the one and only maid off her legs. She decided that she must give her a hint,

though the bare idea of it alarmed her. Angela had a steady personality of the kind which is a polite menace. If Katherine Sandys offended her she would tell immensely long stories about her, during future visits to the aristocracy, and, Socialist as she was, Mrs. Sandys did not care to be made a by-word.

Dinner was an hour late, and Angela, hard and handsome, and dressed as though she expected a footman to hand her silver dishes, sat and talked in an even, quiet voice of her own great worth in the world. Mrs. Sandys was accustomed to being called "wonderful," and it annoyed her to hear some one else monopolise all the virtues with such complete assurance. But to break into the monologue was about as easy as it would be for a lame man to scale a ten-foot wall, and at last, when Georgie was handing the pudding plates, upon which a mess of rather burnt pudding was liberally spread, for Georgie had undertaken the helping herself, Mrs. Sandys spoke of Lousada.

It was, in a way, a tactful move, as she wished to avoid the rather personal side of the issue, so she grasped a second during which Angela was silently engaged with her pudding, and asked her if she had ever met John Lousada. Miss Dubarry was interested. The Northmoors had done all they could to get hold of Lousada, and also the Oxheys. He knew the Duke well, but he was a strange creature, who seemed to elude all known beguilements, and Angela wondered very much how Katherine had managed to capture him at all. But Mrs. Sandys did not tell her. She reaped the advantages of a vague manner and slid away from direct questions, getting round them artfully enough for so simple-minded a woman.

Mrs. Sandys and Angela parted for the night upon good terms, and Angela sat thinking for some time before she turned off the light, a fact which did not escape the notice of Mrs. Sandys, who frequently sat in the dark rather than be wasteful or extravagant.

Mrs. Sandys had given a kind of fluid impression that Lousada was constantly at the flat, without putting it in so many words, and Angela wondered again whether he really came there to see Katherine, who was "out of things," and who never went "anywhere." In spite of her reputation for charity of speech and amiability of mind, Angela could be as critical as any quite ordinary mortal, and she did not think that any man could really be romantically in love with Campion Sandys's widow. She clicked off the light at last, and thought the bed she lay

on excessively hard. At the Northmoors' the beds were pretty good, and at the Oxheys' they were exceptionally comfortable, but the spare bed in Katherine's flat was not unlike a plank, and she felt that it was a proof of great kindness that she should come and sleep on it.

Georgie, in her tiny room, thought again and again of her last meeting with Lousada, and the blood rushed to her cheeks at the memory. She had begun to forget a great deal. Clint and The Gleanings were like a dream which was only real while it lasted, and even Dada and Ardclare were a long way off. Between her and these reflections from the mirror of her memory, John Lousada intervened, and stood looking down at her with his strong, straight eyes. In the days when she had not understood what cruelty was, she would have discarded pretences and faced the facts as they stood between her and Lousada, but her own experience of the inhumanity of life towards the weak or the poor had shaken her strong nerves. Even if their friendship was rooted in a deeper passion, it could not matter so long as they kept loyally faithful to their pledge of silence. Yet she could not cease thinking of him, and wondered what she would do when he went away again. It seemed as though his departure was imminent, and he could not tell when he might return.

And the future? What of the future? There were no Fortunate Isles marked on their map; to think of such places was only to encourage a mocking dream, but Georgie did think of them. She had her own share of the mysticism of her country and a touch of purple magic in her soul. Perhaps things would come right. Romance was alive in her, and she knew that every one who claims a share in the glory of the gods must pay for it to the wardens of the earth world; and then she suddenly remembered Eustace Clint. Not as any vague memory of some one once known, but with stark realism. The sweet, strong scent of the hair-wash he used, and the conquering way he had when he had loved her; the intimacy of their life and its endless effect upon herself, recurred to her, torturing her memory and making her eyes smart with hot tears. She had seemed to be his then, because of that wretched sense of having loved him, and now, if she could forget those searing memories, he was less to her than the recent grocer's assistant, who had reminded her of poor Finney. How did one escape? Clint had been to many others just what he had been

to her, save for the day when they stood side by side in the little church at Ardclare and promised hopefully to live together in love until their lives' end.

As Georgie saw it, the promise still remained. With or without Eustace, she was his wife, closed out, it is true, from any real status it conveyed, scrubbing, cooking and working for her daily bread, living a hard life in hiding and keeping up the pretence with Dada for the sake of all it meant to him, and with no intention of ever returning to The Gleanings again. She knew she was Georgie Desmond, not Georgie Clint, but the knowledge did not absolve her. And then, there was John Lousada. Even though he made all the difference to her, she was pledged by the past to live under the law of restraint and to keep the expression of anything warmer than friendship out of her eyes and heart. Love was forbidden to her, even if the world was a grey place without its radiance and glory. There must be no dallying with precious thoughts and dreams because of the after reckoning with herself. Lousada could not understand this, yet if the whole world either applauded or vilified her, Georgie was painfully conscious of the strength of her own judgments. *"I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and lo! I must die."*

She tossed on her small bed, and the fever of many thoughts kept her wakeful. She had caught a glimpse of immensities hidden by the routine of the day's work, and they startled her, and she felt like a somnambulist who wakens to find himself standing on a high tower where on every side there is danger. Miss Dubarry might discover who she was; Mrs. Clint might come again to the flat and denounce her as an impostor who had run away from a loving husband and a happy home; Lady Duncarrig might happen upon the story and carry it to Ardclare, and that was of all her thoughts the most bitter. Georgie knew what her fate would be once she was at the mercy of the gossips. How they would talk, and how they would rend her in pieces and accuse her of every kind of baseness. They would condole with Dada, pretending that they pitied him, and rejoice greatly over her downfall. One or two would perhaps suspend their judgments, but they would be hurt and distressed because she had told them nothing. In her heart she repeated the cry which has gone up from many others: "Why can't they all leave me alone?"

Even Dada would not understand at all. Dada wouldn't like

to think ill of Eustace, and the story of Averil would be too shocking for his ears. How could one tell Dada such a thing? He always got up and went out of the room if you said anything he did not like. She pulled herself together determinedly. After all, there was no more reason for her to be afraid now than there had been, and she was foolish and cowardly to let her imagination get away with her like this. It was already long past midnight, and the mournful sound of the church clock in the distance made her count the hours that remained in which to capture some sleep. Already it was the day when Lousada was coming to tea, and though she could hardly expect more than to see him, it was something definite to look forward to, and the humour of the situation caught Georgie's mind and blew away the brooding shadows like a spring wind. She laughed a little, her face in her pillow, and she thought of Angela, and how interested she had become when John's name was mentioned. Angela was very handsome still, in her dark, hard-featured way, and she had certainly the cut of a determined woman.

At length Georgie drifted vaguely into the world of dreams and awoke considerably later than usual, to hear Mrs. Sandys knocking on her door and demanding rather irritably whether she was ill.

Georgie sprang out of bed. "I'll be ready in a moment, Mrs. Sandys." She splashed her face with cold water and dressed herself at top speed, neglecting to say her prayers, which was a very unusual oversight with her.

Mrs. Sandys was in her dressing-gown, boiling the kettle on a gas-ring in the kitchen, and she looked wan and esoteric in the yellow electric light. "Miss Dubarry always has tea early," she said with a touch of angry resignation. "I thought I had told you so."

"I slept it out. I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Sandys. I can't think what happened to me. It's too bad, you to be getting out of bed this way."

Wrapping her oriental *négligé* around her, Mrs. Sandys withdrew silently, for she was thoroughly out of temper, and could not very well make it known to Angela.

Breaking a cup in her haste, Georgie assembled the morning tea-set on a tray, and hurried off to awaken Miss Dubarry. "The tea'll be cold if you don't drink it," she said, drawing back the curtains, "and the breakfast's sharp at nine o'clock."

Angela moved in the gloom and took no notice of Georgie, who looked at her, wondering whether in such circumstances it was etiquette to shake the bed-post. She decided to let Miss Dubarry sleep on, and return when breakfast was ready to call her to a sense of the passing time.

A weariness seized upon Georgie as she did the shopping that morning round the small shops at the far end of King's Road. Everything looked tossed and squalid, and there was a sense of dejection in the very air she breathed. It was one of those days when we need all our courage, not to face giants or fight advancing armies, but to stand against the encroachments of life itself. It seemed to her that the very vegetables lying in rank heaps in the greengrocer's shop felt her own weariness, and, adding their quota, threw it back upon her. The meat she bought was dreadfully dead, and the fish-shop exhibited limp corpses of strange contours that distressed her imagination.

There was Miss Dubarry's room to do when she got back, and it meant a race against time, for Angela had left her clothes lying about all over the chairs and floor, and the room, with its unopened windows, reeked of scent. Miss Dubarry was in the drawing-room, writing letters at Mrs. Sandys's table, which Georgie knew was likely to cause a good deal of unpleasantness, for she seemed to have thrown much of Mrs. Sandys's correspondence on to the floor. But through all her rush and activity, the thought of Lousada followed her, and she kept on catching it back to her and reviving her spirits with the reflection that anyhow she would at least open the door to him.

Just as luncheon was at last prepared, Georgie was rung for by Miss Dubarry, who held out a packet of letters and a shilling.

"Will you go to the post office and send these for me?" she said, with a smile of much sweetness. "The one on the top, addressed to Lord Warnfield at the British Embassy in Rome, must be registered."

"Will it do after the lunch?" Georgie asked doubtfully. "You see, there's the back-door bell, and unless I'm there meself the boys won't wait. They're awfully impatient."

Miss Dubarry thought for a moment, and looked slightly taken aback. "They are all very important," she said slowly, "and ought to go at once."

"I could run out now if you'd not mind answering the back door," Georgie said firmly. "Mrs. Sandys will surely be late, and so that'd be all right."

"I suppose I *could*." Angela arched her eyebrows and sighed. "What do I say to them if they come?"

"Just take in the parcels, and if they give any of their sauce let them have as good as they brought. They're awfully cheeky, Miss Dubarry, and it's no use letting them think they've got the upper hand of you."

Again Miss Dubarry considered the question. "Perhaps I had better post my own letters," she said stiffly. "You didn't happen to find a book of stamps when you tidied my room?"

"Not a sign of it." Georgie was nettled by something in her manner.

"Really? You are quite sure?"

"It wasn't there, so far as I know. Would you like me to look again to see if it's in it?"

"Don't trouble," Angela replied. "I left it on the dressing-table." As she spoke, Mrs. Sandys came rushing in. She had recovered her old eagerness at a board meeting, and was in a good mood.

"My dear Angela, I hope I'm not late," she said, making vague, apologetic motions with her hands. "We had Major Bairdsly in the chair, and he gave us a wonderful lecture." She smiled. "What a splendid man he is, so full of love and humanity; he radiates health and healing."

"I wanted my letters posted," Angela said, looking at the pile of envelopes in her hand. "I had to use your notepaper, Katherine dearest, though I do not know what Warnfield will think when he sees that rather strange heading to the paper I used."

"Oh!" Mrs. Sandys looked at the wreck of her writing-table and grew less affectionate and happy. "I see you've written on the League paper. Well, I hope it may make him think. The statistics at the top are the numbers of illegitimate births for each of the past ten years."

Georgie, who had stood by the door, watched an expression of cold horror cross Miss Dubarry's face as she stared blankly at Mrs. Sandys.

"Katherine, what *awful* notepaper you use!" she said in a voice of dismay, and as Georgie withdrew she heard a gentle strife of tongues ensue, carried on quite politely, but with a

touch of acrimony behind the smooth speech and the constant use of the words "dear" and "dearest."

Lousada arrived punctually, and Georgie, who had been waiting in the kitchen, was on her way to open the door when Mrs. Sandys came out of the drawing-room and told her that she need not trouble herself. It was a bitter disappointment, more bitter than Georgie could have guessed it might be, and she retreated to the kitchen and put on the kettle. The one person in all the world whom she wished to see, except Dada, was in the next room, and convention made it impossible for her to speak to him. They might be divided by leagues of sea, so completely was she shut out from him. Her eyes filled with tears. After all, John Lousada was her friend; they had met most creditably under Lady Duncarrig's roof, and he had been staunch and true in adversity. Mrs. Sandys would never have known him had it not been for her, and now she took advantage of her humble position and locked her out. She could hear voices speaking to him and the deep, occasional sound of his reply. He was not pleased to be there; that much she knew, and could he have done so, he would have left them and come into the kitchen. But it was galling in the extreme, and she moved about restlessly, unable to sit still and think. Mrs. Sandys would ring the bell when tea was required, and she awaited the summons with increasing impatience.

At a little before five o'clock the drawing-room door opened, and Mrs. Sandys herself appeared, looking rather nervous and hunted. She said that she would carry in the tray herself so as to save Georgie the trouble; but she avoided her eyes as she spoke, and seemed in a great hurry. "I am afraid Miss Dubarry gives you a lot of extra work since she came," she said. "I must do what I can to help you, Miss Desmond."

Georgie made no reply. She wondered why it was that Mrs. Sandys always avoided the clear issue. If she had said, "I don't intend you to see Mr. Lousada," it would at least have had all the merit of frank speech, and one could have borne it better, but to make out that it was a favour, deliberately bestowed out of kindness, seemed, to say the least of it, so cheap and futile. She did not thank Mrs. Sandys, but went silently into the scullery and pressed her hands over her eyes.

Well, after all, what matter? she asked herself. She could meet him in spite of them, and now she had determined not

to make any attempt to see him before he left the flat. She could and would see him again when Mrs. Sandys was not there to intervene. It was cold and miserable in the scullery, and she stayed there with a kind of defiance.

After a time she heard the kitchen door open, and her heart leapt violently. Perhaps, after all, Lousada had been one too many for them, and had broken away of his own accord. She opened the scullery door, and her sweep of emotion died down again. Once more it was Mrs. Sandys.

"Will you run out to post Miss Dubarry's letters?" she asked with excessive politeness. "She is very anxious they should go to-day. The one on the top of the pile—dear me, what a pile it is!—is for Lord Warnfield, and is to be registered. Will you do this, and bring back the slip carefully, please, Miss Desmond? You didn't happen to see a book of stamps in Miss Dubarry's room this morning?"

"I did not," Georgie said, with a marked absence of her usual cheerfulness.

"Be as quick as you can. Fresh air will do you good," Mrs. Sandys added, and she left the room with a return of fugitive haste.

Georgie put on her hat and coat and went out, closing the door with a bang. She was alight with sudden anger against Mrs. Sandys and Angela. They had taken a mean advantage of her, even though it was all foolish enough. The very idea of their locking Lousada in the small drawing-room was in itself ridiculous—like tying up Niagara or shutting the west wind in a band box. Only that morning she had thought of the possibility of sending Lousada away herself, telling him with full honesty that she cared a great deal too much, and that, as Clint's wife, she must not see him any more. But now her mood had changed. She might, it was true, give him up of herself; but to be jockeyed out of a few kindly words from him was an outrage upon personal liberty. She thought that if she hurried she might still be back in time to see him, so she ran down the wet pavement and stood in the stifling post office, where all the rain-drenched people in the neighbourhood appeared to have assembled, and waited her turn while the face of the clock mocked at her impatience, and at length the letter to Lord Warnfield was duly registered and the flimsy slip handed over to Georgie. She put it in the bag which hung at her wrist and turned to go, hurrying back between the

high houses, one harassed little soul in the great concourse of the streets.

When she reached the flat the drawing-room door was open, and Angela and Mrs. Sandys were standing together at the fire talking in discreetly low voices. Of Lousada there was no sign at all, and Georgie felt a long sigh escape from her.

"I have the letters posted," she said dully, "and here's the slip." She fumbled in her bag. "At least, I know I put it there, wherever in the world it's got to now."

Angela looked at her and waited patiently. "I should like to have it," she said. "It is a very important letter."

"I'm awfully sorry, but I can't find it," Georgie turned her bag inside out in a vain search. "Still, the letter's registered, so it should be all right."

"How very awkward," Mrs. Sandys remarked as she looked at Georgie. "I must say, Miss Desmond, that it seems very careless on your part."

But there was nothing to be done about it, except to offer to go back to the post office and get a copy made out, and as the tea things had to be washed and dinner cooked this did not seem possible.

"Another time," Angela said, as Georgie tendered an apology, "it may be better if I go myself," and she sent a most informing look in the direction of Katherine Sandys.

CHAPTER XXIV

"Do you really think there is something wrong about Miss Desmond?" Mrs. Sandys asked the question tentatively as, at the end of the first week of her visit to Katherine, Angela sat close to the fire and did nothing. When she had finished her voluminous correspondence in the morning she usually went to the house of some friend or relative, and was taken to a concert or a *matinée*, and was then returned in a spacious car to the flat, and in the evenings she established herself in a chair and talked a great deal.

"The first time I ever spoke to her she told me a lie," Angela said judiciously. "Quite a stupid lie, dear Katherine, because she told me she came from Belfast."

"She may—after all," Mrs. Sandys objected. "I, for instance, was born in Vienna, but it hasn't made me an Austrian."

Angela shook her carefully dressed head. "When Mr. Lousada asked if he could go into the kitchen and talk to your maid, I really thought the end of the world had come."

"They met in Ireland," Mrs. Sandys said rather helplessly. "Miss Desmond's father is—I really forget what—but something to say to the church."

"Probably a sexton," Miss Dubarry suggested. "Katherine, with your views—even with your views—it is hopelessly wrong to encourage that type of liaison. I told you that I thought Mr. Lousada interesting, but we know very well that to ask to speak to your maid was going too far. I met him to-day at the Sheltons', and when he spoke to me I think he must have understood what I felt about him."

"I didn't explain," Mrs. Sandys broke in. "You see, I gave her permission to have a man to tea. It is far better to regularise these affairs—and then, to my great surprise, it turned out that he was Mr. Lousada. He was very charming, and I asked him . . ."

Angela flung Mrs. Sandys's remarks aside with steady determination. "For a man of his class to carry on an intrigue with a servant is disgusting. I told Moira Shelton, and she was

scandalised. She said she considered it to be rather your fault."

"My fault?" Mrs. Sandys flickered up into resentment. "I really do call that too bad. How is it my fault?"

"You gave him some kind of permission to meet her, I suppose. Be clear about it, dearest. You know nothing of the woman, do you? References, I mean, and so on?"

"I didn't trouble. At the moment I was without any one, and the girl who had been here was dreadfully impertinent. Miss Desmond is cheerful and attractive, and I took her. Indeed," she added earnestly, "except for the fact that Mr. Lousada has been here, there is nothing whatever against her. She does her work, and I certainly can't find fault with her."

"Then she may have been *anything* before she came to you? And this cock-and-bull story of having met John Lousada in Ireland—my dear, I know that he was there once, staying with the Duncarrigs. Is it likely they would have met at Ardclare?" She laughed a quiet, contemptuous laugh. "You don't know the Duncarrigs if you imagine that they invite the servants into the dining-room. However, I intend to sift the question and find out whether she was one of the maids in the house. Mr. Lousada may have met her carrying up the hot water and taken a fancy to her. There was an awful scandal about Willie Gregg, Lady Emily Campion's son, which began in much the same way. She was a housemaid, probably, if she was there at all."

"She said they met at a party."

"She said? I should think she did. My impression is that she will say almost anything."

The conversation about Georgie wound in and out through a maze of sinuous curves and bends, Mrs. Sandys following reluctantly upon Angela's steady leading. For some reason, Angela was angry with Katherine's maid, and determined that Mrs. Sandys should get rid of her; but Mrs. Sandys had a mulish obstinacy in her which resisted assault. Putting aside the question of Lousada, or even admitting that Georgie's friendship with him was inadvisable, she had not the smallest desire to send her away.

It struck her as odd that Miss Dubarry should take such a strongly personal attitude in the contest, and also that she seemed to dislike Georgie so intensely. With no abatement of her ever dignified reserve, Angela flogged the subject with un-

remitting violence. Every prejudice she had seemed to spring into active life at the mere mention of Georgie's name, and she gathered her forces for her overthrow.

"One would think that the girl had been rude to you," Mrs. Sandys remarked. "I hope she has not."

"Rude to me?" Miss Dubarry opened her eyes wide. "Of course not, Katherine. I should never give a person of her class the least opportunity for impertinence. I am sure that she is not a Protestant; you can simply *feel* that she is not, and I only warn you out of consideration for you."

"I do not understand religious bigotry," Mrs. Sandys said in an exhausted voice. "It is all the same to me what superstition she holds. I can't follow you at all, Angela."

"It's easy to see that you have never lived in Ireland," Miss Dubarry replied, with a rather grim look, and then they spoke of other things.

Georgie was not aware of what was going on in the mind of Miss Dubarry. She knew that she was exacting and difficult to please, and that life in the flat had altered for the worse since her arrival. Everything was less punctual than it had been, and the weekly books rose in their total in spite of valiant efforts to keep them down. Mrs. Sandys was constantly out of temper with her, and had lost all her original friendly attitude, and Georgie did not know that, in spite of this, she fought her battles with great loyalty. But she was disgruntled and irritated, and the increased expenses made her critical towards Georgie, because Angela had told her again and again that Irish servants were wasteful, and that they could not be trusted with stores.

All her life Katherine Sandys had suffered from not knowing her own mind. She had married Campion because a friend of her own fell in love with him and impressed her with the idea that he was the most wonderful man on earth. Later on, she had rather changed her view of him because another friend who was an active leader of the Women's Suffrage Campaign felt that all men were poor creatures, and in her religious and emotional evolution Katherine had been a human chameleon changing colour according to the background upon which she was placed.

With Georgie the time passed heavily. A line from Lousada told her that his effort to see her the day he came to tea at the flat had been a failure, and he invited her to dine with him

the first evening she could get free from her duties. Towards the end of the week following his visit, Angela was invited out to dinner, and this was a far more rare occurrence than would seem probable with anyone who devoted a lifetime to friendships. Georgie heard the whole conversation which took place over the telephone, and sounded rather as though Miss Dubarry was invited to stop a gap. That, however, was a very minor detail in the eyes of Georgie, and she managed to get out and ring up Lousada, giving him the joyful news that she would be free that night.

"Th' Angel from Heaven is going to dinner with some one in Park Lane," she announced, speaking rapidly into the receiver, as she stood in a dark and stuffy box in the nearest post office, "and as Mrs. Sandys has to go to a lecture and a coffee scrimmage, I'll be off for the evening, John. I'm just dying for a bit of fun. It's been awfully dull lately. Every one as cross as the cats. What's that? . . . I said they were as cross as the cats. . . . Why stay, is it? . . . I might be worse off. The girl on the flat above tells me that the two she looks after throw plates . . . crockery . . . peg the dishes at each other."

She smiled as she listened to his reply, and then spoke again. "In Jermyn Street? Isn't that rather too grand? Oh, a quiet place? No fear of meeting any one I'd rather not meet. For the love of goodness don't let me in for that. Very well, I'll be there at about eight, when I've hooked th' angel into her ball dress. Aren't you mad to think you're not to meet her? Or didn't you make such a good impression after all? I thought you'd not." She hung up the receiver and ran out again into the street, meeting Mrs. Sandys, who got down from a bus.

"I'd ran out of salt," Georgie said glibly.

Mrs. Sandys realised that the girl seemed gay and light-hearted again, and that was satisfactory. She also welcomed the news that Angela was dining out, when she heard it at lunch.

"I've promised so often to dine with Luke and Mary," Miss Dubarry said, looking excessively composed and dignified. "Some days ago I met Mary, who was full of reproaches. She said I neglected them shamefully. Luke has been made a General, and one feels so proud to think that all his fine Staff work has been appreciated, though it was hard on him never to get to the trenches with his battalion. They are having a

few friends—Captain Moreton and Danny Butt. Can you spare me, Katherine?"

Mrs. Sandys said that she could spare Angela, as she was going to Caxton Hall to attend a meeting at which she might possibly have to propose a vote of thanks. She did her best to impress Angela with the importance of her announcement, but failed.

"Poor dear Katherine," Angela commented sympathetically, "how pious you are. I wish you could meet Luke, he would inspire you. The true type of soldier, but I know you don't like soldiers. Danny Butt is a good little fellow, though very middle-class, and to show you how broad-minded a man Luke is, he actually chose him for his A.D.C. against two men who had both been at Eton and were in the running for the job. Captain Moreton has quite a large place in Yorkshire, and only remains in the army because he likes the life."

"Likes killing people?" Mrs. Sandys said, with a flash of temper. "How horrid."

Angela looked at her pityingly. "I suppose he has killed people," she said. "But I did not mean that. I mean that he likes the life."

"So you said before," Mrs. Sandys retorted. Angela was capable of repeating the same things to infinity, and her personal details were as endless as they were dull. She could have gone on talking about Captain Moreton for hours if time permitted, and yet say nothing in the least arresting.

In any case, the blessed fact remained that Angela was disposed of for an evening to Luke and Mary, and also to Danny Butt, who was of no consequence, and Captain Moreton, who had a place in Yorkshire and liked military life.

Georgie saw Mrs. Sandys out of the flat, for she was the first to go. She wore a more ornate dress than usual and a long cloak which suited her very well; and she had bought a three-cornered hat that gave her the air of a rather holy highwayman. The effect was good, so good that Georgie commented on it.

"Well, you do look nice," she said. "There won't be one there who will beat you, Mrs. Sandys, and I've noticed once or twice that the serious ladies often aren't the best looking, but it's very different with you, and when you were young you must have been a beauty."

Mrs. Sandys was not used to compliments, and even though Georgie had rather seriously tempered her admiration by the reference to the passing years, she was quite pleased and told her not to be lonely.

Having seen Mrs. Sandys out of the door, Georgie was called upon to assist the toilet of Miss Dubarry, who did not encourage conversation until the process of dressing herself was nearly concluded, when she relented very slightly and told Georgie that she was going to dine with General and Lady Framingham, who were her devoted friends, and whom she had rather neglected of late, and spoke also of Danny Butt and Captain Moreton, who had a place in Yorkshire.

"Officers have a fine life," Georgie said reflectively. "Now there's nothing so nice as a regimental ball."

Angela glanced at her obliquely. "Were you ever at one?" she asked.

"I've read about them." Georgie flushed hotly, and thought of her own past glories. "In books and that."

Miss Dubarry made no reply, but picked up her gloves, and standing for Georgie to envelope her in a cloak which had once been worn by Lady Oxhey, she required her to call a taxi.

It took a long time to get Angela Dubarry's cab, and Georgie ran to and fro like a hunted hare amid the traffic of King's Road. Time, which meant so much to her, almost as much as it must have meant to Cinderella, was flying, and never had there been such an obdurate collection of drivers or such a string of taxicabs, all carrying single and, to her mind, wickedly selfish individuals. The papers said that the war had made for comradeship, and that even magnificent private cars pulled up when they saw neglected people waving vainly from the pavement; but if this had ever been true, it was true no longer, and a good half-hour passed before Georgie at length captured an empty cab and drove back in it to the entrance of the block of flats. Miss Dubarry was in a thoroughly bad temper by the time she arrived, and hardly thanked her for her service as she pushed into the taxi and directed the driver to lose no time. Luke, Mary, Danny Butt and Captain Moreton, would all be waiting for her, and Luke was very particular about his food.

Georgie watched her go with a sense of thanksgiving in her

heart. At length the way was clear, and she could run up and change her dress for a cheap little affair which was called a "restaurant gown" and was made of something nearly as flimsy as paper. She had pleasure in wearing it, and it suited her in spite of the fact that it was so obviously cheap. Her great power of enjoyment conquered its poverty, and as she glanced at herself, she decided that if it were not for her hat, she would look very nice. Her hat was such a failure that it damaged her whole appearance, and she thought longingly of a beautiful thing made of gold tissue and purple which Angela had received a day or two before, and which did not suit her in the least. The Duchess (which Duchess, Georgie never knew) had worn it when she opened a bazaar and had not liked it, so she sent it to Angela.

For a second Georgie paused and considered. She knew where the hat was, and as the night was fine there was no reason to fear that an outing would do it harm. If she wore it she would look "reely nice," and Lousada would be pleased. Miss Dubarry took up much of her time and had prevented her meeting him as she had done previous to her arrival. Why should she not make use of this aristocratic slave-driver, and get something out of her?

Again she hesitated. It was not "the thing" to borrow other people's clothes. She looked ruefully at the hat she ought to have worn, and put it on, but there was no getting away from the fact that it made her whole effect common, and even battered and vulgar, and without waiting to think of the moral question involved in her act, she crossed the passage and took the Duchess's hat from its tissue paper wrappings.

It was very becoming, and there was no time to stop and consider anything more. It may be that Satan is a hustler, in league with the clock, because of the awful abruptness with which all really dangerous things happen in this world. Any kind of physical smash rushes to its fulfilment at top speed. So Georgie was caught by the urgency and ardour of hurrying time, and the sight of her own reflection in a looking-glass.

She pulled on her coat, which was the wrong shape and had been part of her trousseau, and running out of the room she did not even remember to switch off the electric light, which is, in every well-ordered establishment, a crime of the very greatest magnitude. She was inspired with a sense of having earned her

pleasure, and she was badly after time as it was. To stop to consider whether she was behaving nicely in borrowing from the unconscious Angela, never occurred to her, and she ran on dancing feet towards the subway of the nearest Underground Station.

CHAPTER XXV

IF Georgie had taken the law into her own hands and possessed herself of a hat to which she had no real claim, she was rewarded for her hardihood when she saw Lousada's look of appreciation. He seemed quite overcome for a moment, and then he spoke.

"You look very elegant, Georgie," he said, leading the way to a small table in the corner of the restaurant. "What have you done, exactly? I'm no critic of detail, but the general effect is tremendous."

Georgie sat down and laughed as she glanced at him sideways.

"It's my bright eyes, isn't it?" she asked. "D'you like me hat, John?"

He studied her attentively and decided that he did. "I suppose you bought it at a sale? It seems as if it was made of gold and might have come from a jeweller's. What funny things women wear on their heads."

"I didn't buy it all. I trimmed it myself," she replied triumphantly. "Oh dear, it's donkey's years since I saw you, and I've been worked like a black ever since."

"Ah, you do know then, when I'm not there?"

"Is it know? I miss you"—she looked down quickly—"that's the truth."

Lousada glanced round the restaurant impatiently. It was crowded with people, and who can really talk of the secrets of the heart in the fear of possible eavesdroppers? He was going away, and before he left he had a number of things to say to Georgie which should be said quietly and without interruption. How long he might be absent he did not know, and he had no power to control his own movements. Whatever she felt about it, he wished to make sure that never again should she be left at the mercy of utter poverty, or drift penniless into some cruel condition of circumstances which would assuredly befall her were she without friends or money.

He had an uneasy feeling about Mrs. Sandys, and his visit

to the flat when he met Angela was not reassuring to him. When he had spoken of Georgie the whole atmosphere froze, and later, when he and Miss Dubarry had met again, he felt that she was likely to be more than a passive objector. It was all very small and insignificant, and Lousada was irritated by its futility and held by its petty power. Georgie was thrall'd to its significance, and the uneasy sensation that he could do so little to protect her, haunted him.

"I have begun to think," he said stormily, "that servants have less safeguards than any other class of women. Don't laugh at me, Georgie, it's quite true. Mrs. Sandys is omnipotent, hatefully so. She can make your life wretched all day long if she chooses, she can nag and bully you, and eventually deprive you of a—what is it? A 'character,' isn't it? Turn you out with a month's wages in your pocket and ruin you with any one else you go on to. It's damnable."

"Y'ought to join the Slaveys' Union and go about speaking on platforms," Georgie said cheerfully. "It would be a fine draw, John, for I'm told that you're awfully well known in society. Mrs. Sandys isn't so bad at all, and once we get shut of the Angel we'll all be happy again. The trouble with Mrs. Sandys is, that she's as changeful as the winds, and gets persuaded against herself."

"I'm very worried about you," he said slowly.

"Then worry away some other time," she retorted. "Isn't it little enough I see you as it is, to be filling the time with your old botherations. I came out for a bit of fun, reely I did, and you're as dull as can be."

"Can't you understand that I'm going away?" he asked desperately, "and that I want something settled between us?"

Georgie grew very pale and she pressed her lips together. The anguish of her heart was hard to conquer, but she rose against the inrush of pain and drove it back. "There's no use going out to meet sorrow," she said, choking down a quick sigh, "what good will it do either you or me?"

"If I didn't care about you, even if you meant next to nothing to me, I should at least have the wish to make things a little more secure," he said stubbornly. "Let us drop this ridiculous hypocrisy, Georgie." He leaned across the table and put his hand over hers. "Look here, my girl, I love you. Why can't I say so and have it out? You know it's the truth, and when you know that, can't you be honest?"

Georgie turned her face from him and the laugh she gave had not a gay sound. "And all the waiters looking at you, John! You ought to be ashamed. Leave go my hand."

"You've not answered me," he replied in the same low, earnest voice.

"You're forgetting one thing." She looked towards him again and her face was set and firm. "I'm Eustace Clint's wife."

"All this talk is moonshine—moonshine, Georgie," Lousada said desperately. "I'm not asking you to run away with me, though God knows I'd give anything to think that you'd listen if I did. I'm only telling you that your present attitude is making my going away into sheer misery, as if one wasn't wretched enough already. Clint drove you out, and I don't see that you owe him anything—but let that be; at least you do owe me a little consideration. Am I nothing at all to you?"

Georgie nodded silently and her lips trembled.

"Then if I am, let me do something. If I was to be in London and near you I wouldn't ask this, because at least I do believe you'd come to me if you were in trouble, but can't you realise that I may be away for months? I may have to go at any moment, and I shall quite likely be in some damned inaccessible place where I shall only get letters after weeks of delay. Oh, Georgie, I could shake you."

"You needn't rub it in," she said, in a voice which was hardly audible. "I know what it's all going to mean to me, well enough. D'you think that I'll not miss you?" Her raised eyes met his and they looked silently at one another.

"Then you won't refuse to let me pay something into the bank for you?" he said after a moment. "Just for my own peace of mind? It will make life easier out there, and after all, it's such a little thing to do."

She shook her head. "I don't want that from you," she said, and she fiddled with the crumbs on the table, making a pattern with her finger. "I might, right enough, John, if I didn't care at all for you. You told me to be honest, and I'm being honest." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "I love you every bit as well as you love me, and it's wicked of me to feel as I do. There's times when I get mad thinking of you, but I'll not go back on my principles—even though they're a terrible bother to me, and I'll not go back on Dada. If I did I'd not know a day's happiness in this life."

Lousada said nothing, and there was a long pause before

Georgie spoke again. "That's the way of it, John, and I'm awfully sorry, because you've got to suffer too."

"But is it going to be like this always?" he said, and his eyes told her how deeply moved he was. "Is there no hope ahead? Think of your own life and what it is. Can you face it and still say that you won't give in? Listen, Georgie, I'm not pleading my case quite selfishly, because I'll not come near you again if you tell me that you would rather I kept away; one can bear these things when one must. But let me at least have the happiness of knowing that you are safe. I can do that, and surely you haven't the heart to refuse?"

She seemed to reflect over what he had said before she answered him. "I'll sleep on it." She gave a wistful and desperately pathetic little smile. "Will that do? I'd like to say a few prayers about it and see what I feel like after. I still say my prayers."

"Say one or two for me." He returned her smile. "I expect I need them pretty badly."

"Oh, I'll not forget to put in a good word for you." She tossed her chin up and laughed again. "Make sure of that. Mrs. Sandys tells me that it's all nonsense, but then I was brought up different. Glory!" She looked at the clock which was set in ornate moulding over a fire place, where a gas fire made great pretence to look as though it was made of logs of wood and coal. "Talk of Cinderella, John, I'll have to fly or the skies will tumble."

She got up from her chair in real alarm, and he looked at the watch he wore on his wrist and realised that indeed it was dangerously late. "You must taxi back," he said, "it's the best way. Get your coat and join me outside."

Georgie took one more look at him as he walked down the lane between the tables, and her eyes were soft as she watched him go. He meant everything in the world to her, and the uncertainty of life haunted her for a second. To think if one parted like that, and the known order of events broke asunder with a cleavage which made the gulf impassable, so that one never met again . . .

She hurried to the room where her coat was hanging on a peg, and looked with dazed eyes at the bare shoulders of the women who were coming in late. She and they were alike—human beings—swept onwards by the river of fate, but they did not seem to know this as they pushed, and stared at one

another, or powdered their faces and arranged their hair. She had no time to linger or indulge in extravagant fancies, and giving her ticket to the attendant she slipped into her coat and went back into the restaurant.

It was nearly empty now, as all the people who had come for dinner had gone away, but the later arrivals were beginning to appear, and as she walked down the brilliantly lighted room, her heart stood still and the blood in her veins seemed to freeze; her knees trembled suddenly and she stopped mechanically, staring at a man who rose from his seat at a small table. He was not alone. The girl with him had pale blonde hair grotesquely curled and dressed, and her clothes, though expensive, were vulgar and loud in style. You could see any number of such as she at a hundred restaurants in London with nothing to distinguish one from the rest. At that moment she was admiring herself in a small mirror in her vanity bag. But it was not of her that Georgie thought. She was transfixed by the wild alarm which stirred her to the soul as Eustace Clint pushed back his chair and stood challenging her with his old look.

Georgie gave one rapid glance around her and moved forward, but he barred her path. Once again he was terribly real to her, and she noticed the careful effect of his well-made clothes and the way his hair shone. She had been very proud of all this in the past, but a feeling of violent revulsion assailed her.

"Georgie!" he said. "You at last! I always knew I would find you sooner or later."

The girl at the little table looked up, and her face grew petulant. Some one was interfering with her catch of the evening, and yet, in a place like that, she could not well make a scene.

"I'll not speak to you," Georgie said, as she walked past Clint, who caught at her coat with his hand. He had been drinking a little, not sufficient to make him lose his sense of decency, but enough to make him careless of consequences.

"I must speak to you," he said rapidly. "Wait one moment, Georgie, and I'll settle up this little affair." He turned as he spoke and went back to the table, leaning on his hands and talking quickly, his eyes still on his wife. It was her one chance, and Georgie took it. She hastened her pace and ran out into the street, her heart pounding violently and her whole soul centred on the one idea of escape. Having seen Clint made it frantically clear to her that she loathed him, and she

even forgot Lousada in the trembling access of revolt which shook her from head to foot. Lousada was not there, and she ran on blindly until she had reached the entrance to the Haymarket Theatre, where an empty taxicab passed.

Hailing it wildly, she stood panting in the strongly-lighted space under the pillars, and as the cab pulled up she realised that she was too late. Clint had gained on her and caught her once more by the arm.

"Georgie," he said violently, "Georgie, you must speak to me. It's absurd of you to run away like this."

She released herself from his hold and got into the taxi. "Drive to the picture palace in King's Road," she said, and her own voice sounded breathless and strange, and the driver peered at them curiously. He was well used to unusual exhibitions of feeling as the hour grew late, and Clint held up a piece of money behind Georgie's head.

"Jump in," he said with a laugh of offensive familiarity, and still he did not start until Clint had followed her into the taxi, and they slid quickly down the street.

There was no escape now, and she drew back into the corner of the cab, shivering violently. It seemed so unbelievably strange that this should have happened, and Clint laughed as he caught her in his arms.

"I'll forgive you, Georgie," he said, as she strained away from him wildly. "I'm not vindictive, though you've behaved damn badly, cutting out like this and hiding away."

"Leave go of me," she said, pushing him back with her hands. "I can't bear you, Eustace. There's the past between us, and nothing I know of has changed all that you did. Even to-night you were with a queer kind of a girl."

"Well?" he drew back, and she knew he was angry. "What if I was? You chucked me over and left me. Did you expect me to go into a monastery? Good God, when I think of the utterly heartless way you've treated me, I wonder at you."

"I've done with you," she said sullenly. Her thoughts went off to Lousada, and she wondered what had happened to him. He must have gone far afield to look for an empty taxi at that crowded hour, and now he was looking for her, and seeking her in vain. Here she was, shut up in close proximity to Clint, with no hope of getting away. When they came to the picture palace she must get rid of him somehow. Once he knew where she lived it would be impossible for her to remain there

any longer, and homelessness and a dread of what lay ahead turned her cold.

"Done with me?" he laughed, and spoke in his slow, laboured way. "I rather think not. Come now, Georgie, old girl, let bygones be bygones. I'm asking no questions," he pinched her arm with significant suggestion; "give me that much credit."

"I left you for reason, and I'll not go back," she replied. "Eustace, haven't you a glimmer of fairness in you? Since ever I went away, I've been at honest work."

"I've missed you," he said, and she felt that he spoke truly enough, "often and often I've missed you. I put at least a dozen advertisements in the papers, asking you to write. There is my side to the question. Remember that."

"Is it that you want me to forgive you?" she asked dully.

"Yes. Why, of course I do, Gee, it was only a passing feeling I had for that girl. She's an awful little cat," he added. "I'll take you right away and we'll have a second honeymoon"—again he tried to draw her into his arms. "If there have been one or two since, that was your fault, wasn't it? Kiss me, Georgie, and don't be a silly little goose."

Again she struggled with him violently. "I'll forgive you," she said, her voice breaking on the words, "but I'll not come back. You don't understand me at all. You think a kiss and a few soft words are enough to make all square between us, and that I'll go home with you again." She was panting under the tight grasp of his hands. "I despise you, Eustace, it's no good me saying I don't. You're as cruel as death, and it's not me you're thinking of, but yourself. Oh, let me go, let me go!"

"Let you go?" he withdrew his arms, and his temper flared up suddenly. As he saw it, he had behaved with great magnanimity. He was asking her to come back and be his wife while he suspected that her own record had been, quite possibly, a tarnished one. She was alone at a restaurant, obviously well dressed, for he had noticed the Duchess's hat, and the very idea of it piqued and intrigued him tremendously. Her former "holiness," as he called it, had been a worry. She had been so shockable and so innocent, and he did not care for innocence for long, but even so she had managed to charm him in some indefinable way. To recapture her under such bizarre conditions appealed to him, and he felt that this was a romance along

lines he could understand. Having seen her, he felt his old sense of possessorship rise in his heart, and he wanted her to come back again. As his wife, possibly the situation was a wash-out, but that didn't much matter, because he would certainly have the whip hand of her, and his main feeling remained one of conquest.

"Let you go?" he repeated. He was outraged by her words, staggered, astonished and angry. "What do you mean? I find you drifting about the streets, dressed up as you are, and I ask you what most men in my position would think? In spite of that, I am prepared to take you back. Oh, look here, drop that ridiculous talk of my sins and shortcomings, and be sane, for God's sake."

"You can think anything you like," she said apathetically. "What you think makes no difference to me one way or the other. I'll not go back."

"If you had a shred of decent feeling," he went on, raging at her, "you'd be down on your knees, thanking me. I call it pretty decent to make the offer I have, and you——" he waved his hands with a helpless movement of despair. "I should have thought that by this, you'd know which side your bread was buttered, if nothing else. What have you been doing, since you *are* out for facts? Why do I find you as I did? Were you dining with a man who cleared off?"

Georgie's eyes were turned to the window. It was late, and circumstances were becoming more and more complicated for her. In a few minutes they would have reached their destination, and Clint must not follow her to the flat. Her agitation grew, and she sought in her mind for some possible way to avert this menace.

"I was doing nothing wrong," she said in a low, suppressed voice. "Y'ought to know me better than that. But meeting you so unexpectedly has upset me, Eustace."

"Oh, has it?" he sat stiffly beside her and stared at her profile.

"I wish you'd be sporting," she said, half pleadingly. "I don't want you to know where I'm living—my place of business——"

Clint made a sound of disgust and shrugged his shoulders.

"It's honest work, and 'twould get me into trouble if you came there. I'd be sacked. They're awfully particular. Don't be hard over this, will you?"

"You're lying," he replied. He seemed to have made up his mind about something, and his brevity was alarming in a man who usually talked far too much.

"I'll write to you," she went on. "I give you my word, and I'll not break it. Will you part from me now and let me go, if I promise you that much?"

The cab stopped with a jerk, and Clint opened the door and got out, telling the driver to wait, and together they stood on the pavement.

"After all," he said, looking at her, "I acted rather impulsively. It's pretty beastly to find you out like this, and needs thinking over. I offered to forgive you and take you back, and you refused me. Now, look here, Georgie, I'm easy going and all that, but I don't want you to count on my asking you twice. I shall have to go into the question—I mean, I really *must* know what you've been doing; it makes it all much more difficult because I have others to think of. My mother and Eleanor. I acted on the spur of the moment, and because I'd missed you," he looked away for a second, and then looked back at her. "If you want money, I'll give it to you. Anything rather than let you go on like this—you know where it ends? All right for a bit, but later on——" he broke off again, and she stood silently waiting for him to finish. "You tried to bluff, and I'm not sure that I blame you. Put the boot on my foot and all that, and yet it lost you your chance with me."

"I want nothing but to be left alone," she said. "Are you done with me yet, Eustace?"

He put his hand on her arm, the light falling strongly on his handsome face. "In trying to bluff me you lost your chance," he said again. "If you'd given in at once, you'd have got me back. I'm telling you this to show you how stupid you are. You ought not to have given me time to think it over. Why, in God's name, you should like such a life, defeats me, but it is evident that you do, and I don't see that I can be blamed in any way. You can go, Georgie, but I must make you a fair allowance. It's so *awful* to think of you——" he winced and his eyes were full of pain. "Chuck it, and try something decent. Go back to your father and live there quietly. There, don't start lying to me again, it's no use; no *good*, don't you understand? I know too much about this kind of thing." He took some notes out of his pocket-book and pushed them into her hand. "Try to keep off it for a few weeks, anyhow. I

suppose I shall have to see my solicitors to-morrow——” again he grew reserved. “I’ll have to get the thing cleared. You promised you’d write, and I must know your address in the event of proceedings.” He was smitten with sorrow for her as she still remained quite silent, and the hurrying crowd jostled them as they passed. “Perhaps, if you pull up, some fairly decent fellow might marry you.”

“Is it accuse me so’s to get shut of me for good?” she asked, like a woman speaking in a dream. “That’s the queerest thing out yet, Eustace,” and she laughed suddenly. “Can you do it as easy as all that? Surely if all the people who go out to dinner can be taken up for it, London’s a bad place for a bit of fun.” She fingered the notes. “And these? I don’t want them. Give them to the girl you left at the restaurant who, I s’pose, earns them.” She dropped them on the pavement, and he snatched them up angrily.

“Oh, I’m done with you,” he said disgustedly. “The fellow you dine with pays well for it, I suppose. Mind you, I’m going to have your address. I’ll follow you if necessary. I don’t trust you a yard.”

“Have you a pencil?” she asked quietly, and he handed her one, “and a card? I’ll write my address on it, and you can follow along in the taxi and see me go inside. All I do ask from you is that you’ll not raise a row.”

Clint nodded silently and took the card from her, giving instructions to the driver, who seemed to enjoy the whole proceeding in a cynical and abstracted fashion of his own. Georgie felt oddly stunned and unlike herself as she hurried along the dark side street, the cab following her, and she stood for a second at the entrance before she went in.

Eustace Clint watched her vanish, and the cab turned and took him back westwards. He was feeling dreadfully shaken by the experiences of the evening, and he realised that he had all but fallen into a trap. His emotion upon discovering Georgie had played havoc with his common sense and judgment, and if she had not been so foolish the results might have meant disaster. As it was, he had the narrowest of narrow shaves. He recalled the story of his friend Armstead who had been spoken to by his own wife at a night club, and had done all he could for her, but could not take her back. No one could take a woman back in the circumstances. Yet he had offered to do

it himself in a moment of weakness. So had Armstead, but upon reflection he had found that he could not.

Georgie had gone under. All she said was untrue, and she had tried to be too clever. Now, the best thing to do was to get rid of her as quickly and quietly as he could. He did not want to be vindictive, and he was honestly sorry about it. Tears came to his eyes as he thought of it all. His own rather wide acquaintance with the class which he believed Georgie had chosen to join, made him all the more sorry, and also more than ever sure that there was nothing for it but a divorce and a decent pension. He was a man with a fairly big position to maintain, and his wife must be something very different from a woman who hung about a restaurant seeking for clients.

He wiped his face with his handkerchief. It was all sickening to think of, and who could dream that Georgie would have sunk to this?

"My God!" he said to himself with deep feeling. "How nearly I let myself in," and he thought that he would ring up his solicitors the first thing in the morning and go and have a talk with them. But the thought of Georgie haunted him. She had stood to him for an immeasurable kind of sanctity, and he saw her face as he had last seen it under the glaring headlights of the foyer of the picture palace. The whiteness of it, and the faint red of her parted lips. There was so much suffering marked on it now, and yet he said to himself that she had retained her strange delicacy in spite of her trade.

The remembrance affected him profoundly. If the life she seemed determined to go on with had not eaten into her and corroded her yet, no wonder that in those few moments she had reimposed her old power over his heart. Why did she look so ridiculously *good*, under that garish hat, all feathers and gold lace, having freely chosen a life of vice and disorder? Who knew better than he the exact meaning of it all? She was in her cheap tawdry flat by this time, recounting, perhaps, the story of the evening to the man who had bought her, and the whole thing was a nightmare of horror. Some fundamental feeling in him was stirred, so that what he had once regarded as a joke or a necessity appeared suddenly very loathsome and repugnant.

"I would have saved her," he reminded himself; "it is none of my doing," and he got out of the cab and walked into his hotel, feeling far more virtuous than was usual with him.

CHAPTER XXVI

GEORGIE was still trembling when she arrived at the door of the flat and let herself in cautiously with her latch-key. The reappearance of Eustace Clint had unnerved her, and she prayed that at least fate might have permitted her to return before the rest of the household. But when she opened the door she knew that her prayers were in vain.

No one was in the kitchen or the drawing-room, and the door of Mrs. Sandys's bedroom was open and all was dark inside, but a sharp razor-edge of light cut clearly under the door of Angela Dubarry's room, and Georgie could hear voices talking within. She had been caught out, and she took off the ill-starred hat and gazed at it regretfully. When she had put it on she had been so happy, and now only a few hours later she felt beaten and menaced and did not know where to turn.

Clint had made it impossible for her to get back to the house in time, and the worst had happened. Should she face the situation at once and go and make a clean breast of it about the hat?

Little, foolish things have often a way of becoming very important in a crisis, and it was her sense of duplicity in connection with the hat which most weighed upon Georgie at that moment. She made up her mind and tightened her powers of resistance as she crossed the passage and knocked at Miss Dubarry's door. Silence followed for a moment, and then the words "Come in," spoken in Angela's most calm and distant tones.

Opening the door, Georgie saw that Mrs. Sandys was standing with her back to the room, looking with concentrated attention at a picture on the wall. Miss Dubarry was close to the door, and she looked at Georgie in stony silence.

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss Dubarry," Georgie said, holding the hat in her outstretched hands. "I know I did very wrong indeed, but I had a message from a friend who wanted specially to see me, and——" she faltered a little, "I know I did *very* wrong, but I took a loan of your hat. I ought to have asked

for it, but I didn't reely know that I'd want it so badly, and——"

Miss Dubarry did not alter her fixed gaze, which became more and more dreadful as Georgie blundered on.

"The night was very fine," she continued more optimistically, "and it didn't do it a sign of harm; and indeed, Mrs. Sandys," she spoke to the back of Katherine's head, "I went out without leave, so I've been as bad as could be all the way round."

She paused again, tendering the hat to Angela, who did not stir, and no one spoke. "Will I put on the kettle—the fire's still good in the range—and make some tea?"

"Please put down my hat," Angela said frigidly, but without emotion of any kind escaping into her voice.

Georgie advanced further into the room and laid it on the bed. "Will I make you some tea?" she asked imploringly. "Oh, Mrs. Sandys, I do hope you aren't out with me? I'd be awfully upset if you were, reely I would. I'd not have such a thing happen for anything in the world."

"You can go now," Angela replied, and closed the door in Georgie's face.

There was no use waiting there, and Georgie felt powerless against so much steady antagonism. She wondered whether she had been seen with Clint, and whether they were thinking awful things of her. How did one escape from a net, the meshes of which one had woven oneself?

She dragged herself wearily back to the kitchen and sat down, covering her face with her hands. Where had Lousada got to by this time, and would he either come or write at once to her? What had Clint really meant by his threat, and was she wise to remain another day in the flat? She felt sure that when they parted he certainly did not wish to see her again. He had thought her the same kind of woman as the girl he had with him when they met; but while it attracted him to the woman with blonde hair, in Georgie's case he saw no excuse; and all this, too, was a puzzle, only that it comforted her to know that she was safe from molestation while his mood of repugnance lasted. Momentary safety was something precious, even if it were fleeting.

Behind or, in a way, in front of all this, was the trouble with Mrs. Sandys, who seemed angry and upset, since she had not answered her at all when Georgie spoke to her. She had tackled the question of the hat and Angela had exhibited a sense

of deep affront, but that was over. Once the confession was made, the affront could take care of itself. Even Miss Dubarry couldn't go on being angry for ever, or even if she did she would sooner or later get that spare bedroom in Park Lane, and things would right themselves.

The door of Angela's bedroom opened, and Georgie started nervously. Perhaps, if Mrs. Sandys were coming out now, it would be best to waylay her and get a chance to speak. She believed that her story would be listened to, and was half inclined to make a clean breast of it and tell her the whole thing, including her marriage to Clint.

There was a streak of suppressed drama in Mrs. Sandys which made her susceptible to dramatic situations. Georgie rose to her feet, the idea strong in her mind, and, as she turned, Angela appeared in the doorway, her face reposeful and even saintly; she carried the Duchess's hat and walked to the kitchen fire. Ignoring Georgie, she opened the top of the range and placed the hat on the burning coals, ramming it down with the poker.

It was ridiculous to be hurt, and absurd to mind far more than one would have minded a good hard blow dealt at one's person, but Georgie felt herself wither suddenly, and all those "fresh springs" which keep life human, fell parched in the sands and sank away. She was, as Angela intended her to be, thoroughly humiliated. The blow had been struck at her pride and self-respect, and the hurt of it went deep. Georgie was never unkind to anyone, and unkindness is a form of malice which can do illimitable damage; it was cheap enough on the part of Miss Dubarry, but there again the cause of her rancours had its roots elsewhere. Though she never admitted it, she knew that her life had been a singularly unsuccessful one, yet she was obliged to keep up a fictitious pretence of her own popularity. She constantly affirmed that she was a good friend and had a reputation for "sweetness"; so that while she really hated the majority of her fellow-creatures she was forced to say kind things of them, and she was in a measure absolved from this necessity in the case of Georgie. Georgie had nothing to offer her at all, she was humble and poor, and if you trampled on her there was no one to take her part. She was also young and intensely alive, and there was no doubt that Lousada took an interest in the girl. In spite of her lonely state, Georgie was unaccountably successful, and Angela, like the rest of us, pre-

ferred to attribute any success along those lines where she herself had failed, to some reason which was far from admirable. Angela's rancour was not in any way original or unique, but it hurt Georgie, bruised and wretched as she was, worse than any blow.

Having destroyed the Duchess's hat, Miss Dubarry left the kitchen with an infinitesimal smile on her face, for she felt triumphant. Not that she really wanted to sacrifice so splendid a piece of finery, but because she thought the pleasure it gave her worth the burnt-offering. Katherine was still in her room when she went back, and, closing the door, sat down on her bed.

"You really must get rid of her," she said, returning to an argument which had already raged for half an hour. "I tell you, dearest, I actually saw her with my own eyes outside the picture palace with Eustace Clint. I know him perfectly well by sight, and his reputation is simply—well, I need not dwell on it. His wife left him, and it is rather a curious fact that she was an Irish girl, a Miss Desmond. Lady Duncarrig told me of it at the time, for the marriage made a lot of talk. I know almost nothing of the facts, but I remember that one afternoon, when I was at Adelaide Lorenn's house, I heard a great deal said about the Clint *ménage*."

Mrs. Sandys sat limply in a basket chair which creaked and groaned whenever she moved. "The similarity in names is curious," she said. "Fancy her having left the lights on, Angela, they were burning in the kitchen *and* in the scullery."

"I don't hold any brief for Eustace Clint, and for all I know, his wife left him for very good reasons," Miss Dubarry resumed, "but I think it pretty well gives this servant of yours away, if she is seen with him. He had his hand on her arm as I passed. Luke insisted on my taking a taxi, though I had meant to take a bus, but he simply wouldn't hear of it. He dislikes the idea of women going about alone late at night, or I might easily not have seen anything. I was not mistaken, for the lights are strong, and really, Katherine, you *cannot* employ a girl who goes out directly your back is turned and picks up with men in a cinema. It is your duty to turn her out at once."

"I must get at the truth of the story," Mrs. Sandys said in a depressed voice, "I never judge anyone. You may not understand the psychology of suppressed mother instinct, and yet it accounts for so many things. Miss Desmond is probably a case of the kind, and it is only fair to her to hear her story."

Angela lighted a cigarette which she smoked with an air of careful rakishness. "My dear Katherine, there *are* limits. I assure you that *I* should not like to be seen dining alone with Eustace Clint; it's as bad as that. One has to draw the line somewhere, and for a servant girl to go out with him—it gives the whole show away hopelessly." She gave an angry smile of contempt. "I think that even you should realise that it is hardly possible to employ her any longer."

"Men are responsible," Mrs. Sandys said, sticking to her guns, "I always stand by women. If Mrs. Clint's son is a black-guard, I think he is entirely to blame. Why should he persecute a poor girl? I admit she has acted dreadfully badly, but all the same, a man of position and education . . ."

"She probably led him on," Angela said dryly, "dressed up in cheap finery and with *my* hat to complete the effect. You seem to forget that she practically stole my hat."

"She did confess to it," Mrs. Sandys objected.

"Only because she was found out already. She probably doesn't know that I saw her with Clint, and I advise you not to tell her. See then, whether she tells you the truth or not."

"Oh, I think she will. I understand her better than you do."

But Angela had got her teeth well into the argument and was ready to worry it until dawn. She told interminable and fearful circumstantial stories of cases she had come across, glittering with titles and profusely decorated with references to well-known names. She raised a pyre of coronets over Georgie's fallen reputation and dragged in a cortège of generals and colonels to back up her evidence for the prosecution. It was as though in Georgie's small person she saw embodied all the frustration of her own years, and she charged at her with bent head. She even dragged Champion Sandys from the other world to assist her, and taking possession of his views declared that he would support her contention.

"If you really do not see the scandalous vulgarity of it all for yourself, dear, do think of Champion. Champion would have turned her out on the spot. Can you imagine him putting up with such conduct?"

"Champion had a very kind heart," Mrs. Sandys replied rather irritably, "I don't see how you can know better than I do, what he would have done in the circumstances."

Angela raised her strong eyebrows, and remained unconvinced. She was constructing a really splendid story to repeat

later and already phrases occurred to her. "I spoke of poor Champion, and asked Katherine to show some respect for what he would have wished, but it was useless. She said she knew him better than I did, which of course is not true, because she never understood him, and he has said to me, time and times again . . ." for Angela was not above inventing when she felt it to be necessary for the good of any cause.

"I do not think it was kind to burn the hat under Miss Desmond's eyes," Mrs. Sandys said as she rose to go to her room. "We do not know the facts, so far, and I refuse to be influenced by circumstantial evidence. I regard that as a piece of cruelty on your part, Angela, if you will forgive me for saying so."

Angela reflected that she had still a week to arrange for, before the Northmoors would agree to let her in, and she swallowed down a strong desire to say that either she or Georgie must leave the next morning. Quite possibly that idiotic Katherine would say that it was she who must go, if she felt so strongly about it, so she refrained.

"You surely did not expect me to wear it again?" she asked stiffly. "I think," she added, as a parting shot, "that all this explains Mr. Lousada's interest in your maid."

Mrs. Sandys wished Angela good night and refused to be drawn into further arguments of any kind. She disliked Miss Dubarry acutely at the moment and reflected on many things as she went to bed. Angela's terrible snobbishness, carefully disguised under a semblance of simplicity; her untrustworthy habit of repeating things, twisted to suit her own point of view, and her intolerable attitude of superiority where Champion was concerned. It was not exactly an argument in favour of Georgie (who *had* left the electric light turned on) but it went a long way in disposing Mrs. Sandys to judge her cause without prejudice. Angela had made the fatal mistake of over-stating her case, and rubbing it in too hard.

As for Georgie, she lay awake for hours, and heard Mrs. Sandys going to her room. They had turned down their thumbs, she and Miss Dubarry, that was hopelessly evident.

She surrendered to the belief that Angela had poisoned the mind of Mrs. Sandys against her, and that her case was a hopeless one, and dragging her thoughts from the angry, burning point, where Miss Dubarry stood, she tried to think what was to be her next step. Should she or should she not confess

anything to Mrs. Sandys? Should she tell her the story of Clint? A sense of further outrage overtook her. After all, she had a right to liberty in this connection. She was Mrs. Sandys's "domestic helper," but even so, she was not bound to recite a detailed account of her whole past life. Why should Mrs. Sandys know the facts? It was a trespass upon all liberty to be forced to tell her.

But what was the alternative? A new hunt for employment, and new loneliness, and, deep down in her heart, a terrible strength added to the temptation to fling away all restraints and go to Lousada. The fight had become a fierce one with the weeks, and her strong love for John Lousada could not be denied. All she need do was to ring him up the first thing in the morning and tell him simply that she had changed her mind and was ready to go to him.

Georgie buried her face in her pillow. She felt lonely and helpless, and also she was now at the mercy of Clint. Eustace had a way of swinging round suddenly and changing his standpoint. To-day he might say that he would divorce her, though how he could do so was more than Georgie understood, and to-morrow he might begin to think that he wanted her enough to forgive her anything. That was the sort of man he was. Whatever he wanted most to do, he did, and nothing else counted with him.

And then, out of all the stormy thoughts which tossed and swept through her mind, Georgie began to think steadily of Dada. Her love for Lousada was wicked, at least it would be if she twined herself with garlands and went along the happy path of doom in his dear keeping. Then Dada would never see her, never speak to her again. He would die without having forgiven her, and if they met in the next world he would turn away, though the probabilities of the meeting might be infinitesimally small. What did it really matter if Miss Dugbarry had been hateful? So many people had been unkind to Georgie for no particular reason. In spite of them she had managed to be happy, and now that there was no more happiness anywhere, she must manage to be brave. She was up against a big struggle with life, and it was doubly hard to feel so lonely and defenceless, because one couldn't run away to John and chuck the rest of the world to blazes.

So many people hated her, and it is very hard to endure hatred when one is young. Later on it matters little enough,

but at twenty-four it is unendurably hard. They would try to push her down between them all, but they would not be able to do it. Had Georgie known of it she might have consoled herself a little with the words of the Confederate General, "Here comes that damned green flag again!"

For Dada's sake, and for the sake of the queerly stubborn principle she held, she determined to do battle, let come what might, and as she lay on her bed she prayed with renewed energy. The world professed to know the mind of God (just as Angela professed, when it suited her, to know the mind of her cousin Campion Sandys) but the world was wrong. Let them do their worst and call down fire from Heaven upon their altars, she had no intention of giving in, either to the longing she carried in her own heart, or to the frowning faces ranged against her. But she dreamed of the Duchess's hat, because, however high we climb in moments of spiritual insight, a small thing can always bring us back to this ignoble earth again.

CHAPTER XXVII

EUSTACE CLINT had no intention whatever of telling his mother anything about his meeting with Georgie, but he was temperamentally changeable as a weather-cock, and subject to sudden reactions which were intensely perplexing to those who did not know him well; so that he was at the mercy of every anticlimax. A sense of duty forced him to call at his mother's house when he was in London, and he went there much as he went to church on Christmas Day, because he had always done so; and he made this concession to principle the day after he had seen Georgie for the last time.

He was never at his best when he sat in her drawing-room and looked at her heavy yellow face, wondering what in the world could have induced his father to marry her. He had avoided lunching with her, and arrived in time for tea to find her alone, and at once he felt very young again, in the sense that he knew she had never admitted his natural right to live his own life.

Mrs. Clint did not favour independence, and she would have precluded him firmly from freedom or responsibility had she been able to do so. He had escaped from her clutches long ago, and had she known the details of his life, he felt that she would certainly have had an apoplectic fit, but she had by far the stronger character of the two, and had a curiously sly way of worming out intelligence while she sat in her deep easy chair, her feet on a foot-stool.

"Any word of that dreadful girl?" she asked, alluding to Georgie. "Ah, dear me, what a shocking mistake you made, Eustace."

He knew the inference perfectly well. "Why did you not consult your mother? Had you done so, this would not have happened," and the worst of it was that it was in a measure, true. He said nothing, but gave a leathery piece of cake to the dog who sniffed at his knee.

"I feel that something should be done," Mrs. Clint went on;

"though I entirely disapprove of divorce, I think you ought to regularise matters."

Eustace looked down, his face flushed, and stretched out his legs before him, his white spats showing up defiantly against the dark carpet. He was annoyed, but in spite of that Mrs. Clint managed to dominate him. "I intend to see Catterson tomorrow," he said shortly.

Mrs. Clint altered her position slightly and drew her shawl around her shoulders. "Catterson," she said, pursing up her lips. "Ah, indeed. But why Catterson? I have always kept faithfully to Sutton, a steady, dependable man of business."

"Catterson is more suitable," Eustace got up and stood before the fireplace, looking at a water colour painted by his mother in her youth, which was supposed to represent the sea, but which gave the effect of a sodden blue carpet rather badly laid down.

Mrs. Clint grew suddenly alert. She always said that she was difficult to deceive, and she knew a great deal more about her son than he ever guessed. "Then you have come upon traces of the girl?" she asked, shooting the question at him like a clever rifleman.

Clint was silent again and wandered round the room looking into a mirror at the further end which reflected Mrs. Clint. He did not expect any sympathy from his mother, but he was feeling angry and sore, and he was well aware that her by no means despicable powers of invective would be turned upon Georgie. It is very human to desire to receive the simple comfort of hearing that some one who has wronged you is thoroughly and deplorably bad, and in any case she would have to know sooner or later. He fell to the temptation of the moment.

"I have found her out," he said, returning to the fire and sitting down. "That's all."

"Found her out? I did that long ago," Mrs. Clint said with a hard touch of malice. "Who is the man?"

"Who are the *men* would be nearer it, I'm afraid," he replied. "Look here, mother, I don't want to discuss Georgie nor will I stand it if you say unkind things of her. It's simply this, the poor girl's gone under. I came across her last night quite accidentally, and that is how it is."

The light of battle gleamed in Mrs. Clint's eyes and she stared at her son.

"So you found her out," she said smoothly. "I cannot say how I regret this, Eustace," but the look on her face was certainly not one of pity. "What steps do you propose to take?"

"Oh, divorce, I think. There's no object in being tied for life to her. Reconciliation is out of the question."

"So long as she is your wife she can return and insist upon living in your house," Mrs. Clint remarked cautiously. "I am strongly against divorce, Eustace, but indeed the situation is a hopeless one as it stands. There is your position to consider, and Eleanor has no children." She heaved a profound sigh. "Even the most strict-minded must admit the difficulty. I was speaking to Canon Fluter only the other day, and he said that there are exceptions to every rule." She blew her nose loudly. "In your deplorable case one has to reconsider one's views. But how *dreadful*. At a music hall, I suppose?"

"I'm not going to talk of it," he said. "I have her address, and I suppose one must employ a private detective. I believe that is the simplest way."

"Where is she living?" Mrs. Clint asked eagerly. She had a deeply inquisitive nature whenever she scented a scandal, and her instinct for detail demanded far more than Eustace seemed at all prepared to disclose. He hesitated for a time, and at length he told her. When he had spoken, Mrs. Clint jerked herself back in her chair and made an exclamation of amazed dismay.

"But, Eustace, my dear boy, this is the address of Katherine Sandys's flat. It becomes really extraordinary."

"That's where she is," he replied, "I saw her go in."

Mrs. Clint was silent and seemed to ruminate for a time, in fact she was silent for so long that Eustace became impatient and poked the fire noisily.

"I have been putting two and two together," she said with a look in his direction. "I know Katherine Sandys quite well; she is a fool, but we are on the same committee, so we meet fairly frequently. She spoke of an Irish servant whom she had engaged without a character, and I warned her more than once. I assure you, dear boy, that I must have seen the wretched creature and not recognised her—yes, actually—quite lately."

"A servant! My God, mother, it can't be possible." For some reason or other the idea outraged Clint even further than

his own conclusion, and he turned crimson. If that got out it would be damnable indeed.

"Be patient, Eustace, and I will explain," Mrs. Clint continued heavily. "Mrs. Sandys is a crank. A kindly, well-meaning woman who does untold harm. She keeps a servant, it is true, but is, as I know, constantly away from her flat, sometimes for two and three days together; and you can see where the opportunity arises. We must go carefully into this matter."

Eustace was past speech, so he said nothing.

"Katherine believes in some totally ridiculous theory of personal liberty, and she probably allows the woman to deceive her, quite blatantly. Even in the case of an innocent girl I should disagree with her, because it offers temptation, and for a fallen creature"—Mrs. Clint closed her eyes and shuddered—"it is disaster."

"But a servant, mother. It is so awkward. It might have to come out, don't you see? If I divorce Georgie the case will be in the papers, and every one will talk like hell," he got up again and paced the floor restlessly, pushing aside chairs and showing his anger. "It makes my position impossible. Perhaps I'd better leave it as it is."

"When you decided to marry," Mrs. Clint said in tones of great forbearance, "you did not come to me for advice. I have never reproached you, Eustace, and when your wife left you I held my peace." There was something nearly sublime in the way Mrs. Clint alluded to her own wonderful patience. "Now that you are in a fresh difficulty and you have found that your wife is an adulteress," she spoke the word with tremendous solemnity, "will you leave the matter in my hands for a week or two, before you consult your solicitors? If you will do so, I can assure you that you may expect to find her in a different *milieu* to that of Katherine Sandys," she paused for a moment. "I do not profess to have much influence over Katherine, but I think I can be sufficiently diplomatic to insure her getting rid of the woman."

"What induced her to *do* such a thing?" Clint asked furiously, "was it spite? Yet when I offered her money she refused to take it." He had melted now towards Mrs. Clint and he began to tell her the story.

"Ah, she was well dressed, you say? Mrs. Sandys only pays low wages, I know that for a fact."

"Quite well dressed," he said. "I noticed these things, and before I recognised her the hat she was wearing caught my eye. It's all so miserable, mother."

"I believe that many of these women make huge fortunes," Mrs. Clint said, nodding her head mournfully. "No doubt she has got hold of some poor young man and is bringing him to ruin. Oh, my dear boy, we cannot be too thankful that the truth has come to light at last, remember that 'all things work together for good for those who love the Lord.' I knew that my prayers would be heard."

"It defeats me," Clint said impatiently, "I all but took her back."

"Thank God you did not," his mother replied. "I am glad you were honest with me, Eustace, and you will leave the matter with me, will you not?"

"She must be got away from there," he agreed. "If she is using this Mrs. Sandys as a kind of stalking horse, it's inexcusable in any case, though it seems so unlike her. . . . Still, when the case comes on she can't be advertised all over England as being a servant, I couldn't swallow that; only it is so unlike her."

Mrs. Clint looked at him pitifully and quoted Tennyson's line, "The pitted speck, within the garner'd fruit." "Once a moral fault is committed, the result is far reaching," she said, "and, after all, you knew very little of her when you married her. It is your own punishment, Eustace, for I fear your love was not holy. . . . In a moment of passion you tied yourself to a girl who *may* not have been all you thought her."

"She was as straight as a line," he replied and his look grew hostile; he disliked the way in which his mother was lecturing him. One didn't talk like that, whatever one's behaviour might be; but Mrs. Clint had a coarse directness of expression which Eleanor had inherited, only that Eleanor graced it with a perpetual flippancy.

"Let us not discuss it," Mrs. Clint replied. "It is a most unsavoury subject."

When he had gone she sat for some time pondering over the future, like a general thinking out an offensive campaign. She must go very warily indeed, and not appear in person, for the connection between Georgie and Mrs. Clint could not be made known to Mrs. Sandys. With numbers of her other acquaintances Mrs. Clint could rely upon a hint and a few well chosen

words, but Mrs. Sandys was difficult because of her vagueness of principles. Yet her eyes must be opened. Even if Eustace were not involved, Mrs. Clint could not possibly evade her duty in this respect.

At last she rose from her chair and went to her writing table determined to use the greatest restraint as she wrote, and choosing the non-committal expression "Something has come to my ears, the nature of which I feel it my duty to disclose to you," she asked Mrs. Sandys to call upon her some afternoon early in the week.

As she put a stamp on her letter, Eleanor came into the room and flung herself into a chair.

"Any news?" she asked as Mrs. Clint turned to her.

"You have always championed your sister-in-law," Mrs. Clint said ferociously, for Eleanor invariably awoke a feeling of antagonism in her breast, "and now it may interest you to hear that Eustace has discovered that she has become a——"

"I won't hear it," Eleanor broke in, interrupting her mother. "You'll use some awful Biblical word and shock me, mamma. Georgie? What bunkum. Where and how did Eustace get hold of this lie?"

Mrs. Clint ignored her warmth. "I fear you are wrong," she said, with great politeness. "She was painted and over-dressed and she made no effort to contradict him when he accused her."

Eleanor pushed her mother's spaniel away with her feet. "Go away, you sniffing, sanctimonious beast," she remarked, and then she looked at Mrs. Clint. "If it is so," she said slowly, "I suppose you are glad."

During the whole morning after the night of disaster, Mrs. Sandys avoided Georgie, who went about her work with a feeling of utter misery upon her. There was no letter for her from Lousada, nor had he rung her up, and for this she was thankful, as Angela did not go out, and had he done so, she would certainly have intercepted the call. Georgie was hopelessly in disgrace, and though Mrs. Sandys had given her a fleeting look and wished her good morning, Angela had ignored her completely, and no longer rang for her whenever she wanted anything done. It was a lessening of an irksome demand upon her time, but for all that, Georgie would have welcomed the sound.

She decided against confession, before lunch was ready. Perhaps it was a touch of the strong Protestant strain in her which

influenced her decision, but her heart was stony, and she only saw the injustice of her lot. Only God and Lousada knew. They had a right to know, but no one else had the smallest claim to pry into the shabby little mystery which surrounded and shadowed her life. As for Clint and the divorce, for aught Georgie knew, he could take proceedings against her quite reasonably. Wives were the possession of their husbands. Miss White had said frequently, "Once you are married, if your husband wants to put you in the kitchen fire, Georgie, he's within his rights," and she had seemed to think it rather a grand thing. The legal aspect of it was entirely unknown to Georgie and she accepted what Eustace said. Probably she might be taken by a policeman within a few hours and brought to the divorce courts, wherever they were; and at the thought of it her eyes grew hard.

Miss Dubarry lunched alone, telling Georgie that she need not wait, rather as though she were addressing a liveried footman, and the miserable day dragged itself through wearily until at last Mrs. Sandys came in, just after Angela had gone out.

Whether she would have spoken to Georgie had Angela been there, it is hard to say, for there was a queer twist in the warp and woof of Katherine's psychology, but alone with Georgie in the flat, she proceeded to the kitchen and looked in.

"I rather want to speak to you, Miss Desmond," she said in her nervous, shy way. "I mean, you do really owe me an explanation. It was so wrong of you to take Miss Dubarry's hat and wear it. You should remember that I always trusted you."

"I do, indeed," Georgie replied, twining and untwining her fingers as she stood by the deal table. "Indeed I do, Mrs. Sandys."

Katherine nodded and looked at her kindly. She was wondering whether Georgie was in trouble, and whether she ought to get medical advice for her. "Are you feeling ill?" she asked pointedly.

"I think it was very ugly and very nasty of Miss Dubarry to go and burn the hat," Georgie said, close to tears as she spoke. "You'd imagine she thought I'd poisoned it."

"I do not think she should have burned it," Mrs. Sandys agreed, "but that isn't the question."

"I'm very well, thank you," Georgie said formally, and then her sense of outrage came over her afresh. "What's wrong at

all, Mrs. Sandys? It's true I did go out without leave, but haven't I often heard you say that we're all human beings together and that there ought to be liberty?"

"You left the lights burning," Mrs. Sandys said, and she looked affronted and rather upset at the recollection.

"Glory!" Georgie was crestfallen and shocked. "You don't ever tell me that! Oh, I am so sorry. What can I say, indeed? Me, leaving the lights on," she advanced a step or two imploringly. "Mayn't I pay for it? Do let me make it up to you. *Reely*, I'd rather. I can't think how I was so careless. 'Tis no wonder you are out with me and I deserve every bit of it."

Her evident repentance softened Mrs. Sandys, who agreed to say no more about it, but there was a much graver question to discuss, and she sat down, which Georgie regarded as a good sign, and began to talk again.

"There is something rather—I mean, Miss Desmond, will you be very honest with me? Have you done this kind of thing before?"

Georgie spread her fingers out along the edge of the table and did not look up. She foresaw that Mrs. Sandys was going to try and wrest a confession from her, and she felt stubbornly determined to resist. Still, the question had to be answered somehow. "When I've met a friend, I've taken a turn along th' Embankment," she said huskily.

"But not gone out to dinner?"

Georgie looked up quite frankly. "No, indeed not."

Mrs. Sandys paused again and then returned to the attack. "You don't make friends with men, do you? I know the dangers of London streets and how a girl like you might fall a prey to some rich man who could easily ruin her."

"Is it *me* talk to a stranger?" Georgie's eyes blazed. "I'd like to see him try it on with me. I've never done it, Mrs. Sandys, never in all me life. I'd be ashamed to do such a thing."

Mrs. Sandys eyed her doubtfully, but her dislike of Angela Dubarry worked in her mind. As well as this, there was a ring of what appealed to her as unmistakable truth in what Georgie said. Either she was blameless, or she was the most consummate actress alive.

"I think I should tell you," Mrs. Sandys continued, "that Miss Dubarry thought she saw you with some man. Now, I am prepared to forgive you for leaving on the lights, and I shall re-

gard your having taken Miss Dubarry's hat as a piece of foolish and vulgar ignorance on your part, but I cannot keep you here if you don't behave yourself properly. Please don't think me unkind, Miss Desmond, but will you say truthfully, if you really did meet a stranger and let him take you out to dinner and the cinema?"

Georgie stood as stiff as a ramrod and met her glance. It was a comfort to be able to tell a fairly truthful lie. After all, Clint was no stranger, nor had she dined with him. If Angela had seen them together and had repeated the fact, Mrs. Sandys was fully prepared to take Georgie's own word for it, that it was not true.

"I've never spoken to strangers nor let them speak to me," she said stoutly. "If Miss Dubarry saw me, she saw some one I once knew talking to me, which might happen to her and no harm in it, but we only met by accident, and I wasn't long getting away from him."

"Then there is *nothing* between you and him?" Mrs. Sandys asked earnestly. "You know that, though I do not understand your friendship with Mr. Lousada, I fully believe it to be harmless. This other man—can you not tell me his name?"

"I'd rather not. It's all a bit difficult," Georgie replied, her eyes on the row of red tins along the kitchen chimney shelf.

"I wish you could have." Mrs. Sandys was offended and spoke coldly. "However, if you will not, will you give me your word that there is nothing wrong between you?"

"Wrong between us? Certainly not," Georgie said hotly. "What would be wrong? I can't go telling his name because he's no real friend to me"—her eyelids flickered over wet eyes—"and I don't want to speak or think of him again. Miss White used to say that if you talked of the devil he was sure to appear, and there's some truth in it. If I go talking about him, he might ring at the door, and I told you we'd parted."

"Is he a relative?" Mrs. Sandys asked, and the devil of whom she had just spoken tempted Georgie on the spot.

"He's married to a first cousin of my own," she replied with alarming facility. "There's family matters connected with it all."

And then Mrs. Sandys played a terrible trump card. "I know his name," she said, "and I did hear he had married an Irish girl," she smiled quite forgivingly at Georgie. "I also heard the marriage described as a *mésalliance*, and probably she was not

in what is called his class." Mrs. Sandys was so tremendously relieved by Georgie's fictitious support of Angela's story that Georgie herself was staggered for a second.

"I d'no," she said with a slight touch of confusion, "but, anyway, Mrs. Sandys, you need not think what you *were* thinking about me, for it is not true."

"I believe it is not," Mrs. Sandys agreed, "and it is a great weight off my mind. Miss Dubarry will soon be leaving, I expect, and then things can be normal again," and she got up from her chair and left the kitchen.

CHAPTER XXVIII

OPPOSITION of any sort always creates opposition, and when Mrs. Sandys showed that she intended to do nothing about Georgie, Angela Dubarry became more than ever determined that something should be done.

Things had gone badly after the reconciliation, which is not altogether unusual, and Mrs. Sandys, having been generous, became suspicious. A letter received by her from Mrs. Clint re-awakened doubts in her mind, and an interview with that lady agitated her and distressed her. She saw through Mrs. Clint's "John Doe and Richard Roe" subterfuge, as she already knew that Clint was involved, and it shook her impulsive belief in the truth of Georgie's statement. Mrs. Clint had alarmed her thoroughly, and had made her feel that she was a weak fool, easily blinded and a prey to any glib-tongued adventuress. Angela steered clear of the subject entirely, and her very avoidance accentuated her unspoken attitude of mind. Like the rest of us, Katherine Sandys knew her faults, or some of them; at least, knew that she was given to over-impulsive action. Mrs. Clint had not spared her, and had spoken so plainly that she nearly reduced Mrs. Sandys to tears, so that, though she remained outwardly neutral, the basis of her standpoint shook. "You will find yourself washing some very dirty linen indeed, unless you are careful," Mrs. Clint said with the assured voice of a prophet of evil. "*Get rid of her.*"

It was a day or two later that the next occurrence took place, and Mrs. Sandys came back to her flat to find that Georgie was not there. A note, left on her writing-table, told her that Georgie had received an urgent message from a relation who wanted to see her, and would be back in time to cook dinner. It was Friday, the day on which the weekly books were usually paid, and an investigation of the drawer where they lay, informed Mrs. Sandys that a ten-shilling note was missing. The discovery upset her dreadfully, though she managed to hide her feelings from Angela, as she did not wish to be told that she had surely been warned often enough, and Georgie reap-

peared, her face stained with obvious traces of tears, and said she had missed the "relation" at the rendezvous. She looked so wretched and heart-broken, and was so stubbornly determined to say nothing at all, that Mrs. Sandys was divided between pity and reproach.

"I looked in the drawer," she said, "and I noticed that there is ten shillings short in the money I gave you for the books."

"Is there?" Georgie said dispiritedly. "I'll try to find it." She did not appear to care in the least, and was dull and unhappy, hardly taking any heed of Mrs. Sandys, who retired from the kitchen feeling disquieted and distressed. After a little, Georgie came into the drawing-room and laid a collection of silver and coppers and one or two stamps on her writing-table, which Mrs. Sandys accepted silently; she had given her a note earlier in the day and the inference was uncomfortably clear.

"I have a terrible pain in my head," Georgie said, "and I'd like to go lie down for a bit, Mrs. Sandys."

Katherine made no offer of remedies, but gave her permission, and when Georgie left the room, she turned and caught Angela's sympathetic eye. Their late hostility vanished suddenly, and Miss Dubarry spoke in tones of great commiseration. "My dear Katherine, you are the best and kindest woman alive."

The words unlocked the silence between them, and Mrs. Sandys allowed some of her doubts to leak out into speech.

"She looks so *queer*," she said. "And this sudden journey to see a relation is rather strange. I wonder if I ought to speak to her now?"

"Leave her alone," Miss Dubarry replied. "She will only lie to you."

In her own little room Georgie lay sobbing on her bed. She had finished her work at top speed and rushed to the station to meet Lousada for the last time for months, and missed him, only arriving to see the train vanish out of sight. Until he had actually gone, she had not realised what his going meant, and her whole soul was racked with anguish at the sharpness of the blow. She had stood in the great gloomy station, her passionate little face tortured and white, and felt as if all the hope, chivalry and comfort had gone out of her life for ever. Everything else seemed unreal, and the money she had taken to pay for her ticket to Victoria Station mocked her. Why

had she hesitated to spend it on a taxi, why had she haggled with her conscience over a few shillings, when it would have made all the difference if she had thrown all such questions to the winds and felt once more the grasp of Lousada's hands holding hers? She had not even had a glimpse of him to help her. A sense of vacancy and despair crept over her and a spasm convulsed her face.

She had stuck to her principles and would stick to them unto the end, but at that moment passion was stronger than anything else. She stared blindly at the future, and wondered whether her choice had been worth all the pain it entailed. Life had snatched him out of reach of her for an unlimited time, and the storm of longing and frustration, loosed against the heart at such moments, came over her with all its poignancy. She hardly remembered how she had got back to the flat, but she knew that she had wandered, lost and pitiful as a stray dog whose master has gone away, and that on her return she had come to a point where she could stand no more. Mrs. Sandys had discovered the absence of the ten-shilling note, and wanted to know about it. She wanted to know about everything, always, and Georgie's spirits were too crushed for revolt. There was sixpence in stamps in one of the drawers of her dressing-table, and she gathered up a few coppers from a pocket in her coat and put them together, absorbed in her own misery of mind. Why should she have to worry about such things, at an hour when doom was upon her? John Lousada had gone, and in going, he took with him every atom of gladness.

The hours of the night were long in passing and Georgie did not sleep. She arose with anxious eyes and a bewildered feeling of heavy despair, and went through the day's work without a smile, and Mrs. Sandys's renewed avoidance of her passed unnoticed.

Fate, as Georgie felt, had wreaked its utmost and its worst on her, and she could only struggle along and get things done which had to be done. She even ceased to be angry with Angela and could recall the incident of the Duchess's hat without any renewal of heat, and a steady downpour outside the windows of the flat suited her mood.

It was late in the afternoon when Georgie became aware that some commotion was going on in the flat, and that Angela, who had been in and out in spite of the weather, was speaking much more loudly than was usual with her. She was laying down the

law to Mrs. Sandys in angry tones in the drawing-room, and Mrs. Sandys could be heard murmuring in reply. It did not disturb Georgie, for she was still held very far off from anything that was happening around her, by the remorseful longings of her own heart. These miserable trifling duties had cheated her of her half-hour with Lousada, her empty purse had prevented her taking a taxi, and her doubts of Mrs. Sandys's real sincerity had stood between her and her impulse to borrow all she needed.

These things had thwarted her and deprived her of what she most urgently longed for, and at the fresh recollection Georgie sat down by the kitchen table and buried her face in her arms. But in this world it is often not possible even to cry in peace, and the door opened and Mrs. Sandys came in, followed by Angela Dubarry.

Georgie looked up at them, a mutinous curl of soft dark hair trailing over her eyes, and she did not rise to her feet. They had intruded upon her, for, at that hour, the kitchen premises should certainly have been her own, and the lines of her mouth became sulky and rebellious.

"Please stand up, Miss Desmond," Mrs. Sandys said, looking at her with her cold, vague eyes. "Miss Dubarry wishes to speak to you."

"I could hear her as well sitting down," Georgie retorted with sudden incivility, but she got up and stood facing them. Angela gave a slight sniff of disapproval and spoke very loudly and plainly, as though Georgie was a small and unintelligent child.

"I cashed a cheque this morning," she said, "and put the notes in my handbag. There were two notes of five pounds, and two ten-shilling notes, as well as loose silver. I went back to the bank—Gregg's Bank at the corner of Sloane Square—at twelve o'clock, and on the way back I bought one or two things at Kingham's shop in King's Road."

Georgie took no interest in the recital, and she wondered what induced Miss Dubarry to come to the kitchen to make this statement to her. Let her go away and talk somewhere else to some one who was less unhappy and had time to hear her.

"I came in for lunch," Miss Dubarry went on with the same studied accuracy, her deep-set eyes sombre and angry, "and as it was quite half an hour late, I am perfectly sure of the time."

"Is it telling me the lunch was late, she is, Mrs. Sandys?"

Georgie enquired, turning her blank eyes towards Katherine, who made no reply.

"You need not be impertinent," Miss Dubarry remarked frigidly. "I went out to post a letter, leaving my purse in the drawing-room, and now one of the five-pound notes has gone."

"You didn't happen to see Miss Dubarry's bag?" Mrs. Sandys interposed quickly. "It is a brocade one, with silver clasps, and the purse was inside."

"I've never seen a sign of it," Georgie said unsympathetically. Here was this fool of a woman making a ridiculous fuss about a mere question of money. What did five pounds matter, what did anything matter? She turned away to go to the scullery; perhaps they would leave her there in peace.

"Please do not go," Angela said, with a sudden touch of sharpness in her voice. "I think you *must* have seen my bag. It was on Mrs. Sandys's writing-table, and you came out of the drawing-room just as I hurried back, having found that I could not pay for a telegram I meant to send."

"I went in to look at the time, the kitchen clock is broken."

Angela turned to Mrs. Sandys and looked at her significantly and Katherine began to speak, but Georgie did not stay to listen. She retired to the scullery and banged the door. Let Miss Dubarry look for her own money if it was missing; it was no affair of hers. Both these women were independent and could go and come as they pleased, but she had lost her most precious half-hour because they sat talking so long after lunch and wanted coffee. They were responsible, and on the whole she was glad that Angela had lost five pounds. "It's the price of her, and serves her out," she said to herself.

After a time, Georgie opened the kitchen door and saw that the kitchen was empty.

A hot restlessness swept over her and she longed for air. There was time to go out before it became necessary to cook the evening meal, and she went to her room and put on her hat and coat and walked out into the street. London was dreadful to her as she walked, and the dingy pavements and wet, discouraged-looking people oppressed her soul with a sense of exasperation. They were all enduring life just as she herself must endure it, and there was no relief anywhere. She had sometimes felt very miserable in the old days in Ardclaire, and had revolted against the unkindness of the people towards her and Dada. She had been patronised and sneered at, and deliberately

left out by people who wanted to use their petty powers to hurt, and the whole world was turned into a place of mean persecution and whispering slander and scandal. If they would only say honestly, "We hate you, and want to trample you into the mud," it would have been better, and they pretended always that they were in league with God, and tried to pin their actions to the hem of His garment. Angela had awakened memories of things forgotten, and her antagonism was like the well-remembered antagonism of many of the Ardclare people. How did one conquer them eventually? Only by becoming richer and more powerful, and then, though they still hated you, they hid the fact and were outwardly amiable.

The long, grey streets were dreary and ugly, and the light from the electric lamps made pink rays down the damp air, but only spread their illumination a very little way round, and yet in an indirect manner they comforted her a little, for they seemed calm and fixed, and did not leave the world in utter darkness.

At length she returned to the flat and went about her work, songless and mute like a frozen bird, and it seemed to her that a long chain of reality was hourly separating her further and further from Lousada. Wind-swept seas, miles and miles of railway lines, and a tearing, rushing train taking him more and more completely away from her life . . . she could not cease thinking of it, even though it was no use to dwell upon the picture.

All through dinner Georgie waited upon Mrs. Sandys and Angela with mechanical indifference. They were less than shadows to her, whose thoughts were battling with limitless distance. Mrs. Sandys was silent, and looked ill and restless, but Angela maintained her splendid calm and talked persistently, whether Katherine responded or not.

At the end of the meal a violent ringing of the front door bell startled Mrs. Sandys, who rose in her place as Georgie went to the dining-room door. It was as though drama really had come unannounced into the room, for, in spite of her abstraction, Georgie realised that Mrs. Sandys was evidently alarmed, and she looked sick and shaken; even Miss Dubarry's usually placid composure appeared to break up quite suddenly and her dark eyes grew strained and alert. Something which she had been expecting was just about to happen.

As she opened the door, Georgie was slightly taken aback to

see the figure of a large policeman standing in the entrance, and his deep-toned demand for Mrs. Sandys was, in her ears, a cheerful sound. She had always liked policemen, and had played the accompaniments of the head constable at Ardclare at various parish concerts, so she brightened a little, and asked him to come in while she informed her mistress that he was there. On the whole, the incident intrigued her. As she began to clear away she saw through the open door the figure of Mrs. Sandys in her velvet tea-gown and Angela in tomato satin, giving a pleasant colour effect under the electric light.

The policeman produced a notebook and began to write, and they all spoke in lowered voices, and then came to the room and stood looking at her.

For a second she did not understand what they meant, and Angela again spoke to the policeman. "You quite understand. I saw this girl come out of the drawing-room when I returned from the post office, and directly I searched my bag I discovered the theft."

Georgie recoiled in amazement. They were accusing her of being a thief, and had sent for the policeman to take her to prison. The blood rushed to her face and neck and she shivered violently. After the strain of the day this fresh demand upon her staggered her, and her reasoned faculties of comprehension and resistance fell away from her utterly, and she listened, standing perfectly still. It couldn't be true, and yet it was true. It couldn't really be happening to her, and yet it was all happening with tremendous swiftness. How ridiculous to dream of a policeman with a notebook, and of six eyes all staring at her and holding her like hands out of a vague darkness. She was speechless and dumb before them, and the policeman said something which sounded like jargon, adding, as she looked so white and perplexed, that she was to consider herself under arrest.

"What did I do?" she asked dully. "I don't know a thing about it." She turned her eyes to Angela, and there was no expression in them. For a moment she had been pushed beyond the power to express anything.

"I will take you to Vale Street Police Station," the policeman said more briskly. "Come on at once, please."

Georgie walked to the door. "I'll come," she agreed, "but I'll get my hat and coat." She passed closed to Mrs. Sandys, who made an impulsive movement towards her and then drew

back again; but Georgie did not notice her at all. She was so occupied with the one thought which governed everything else. What a queer business life was—a queer, queer business—just *queer*. And what in the world would Dada say if he knew?

She put on her hat and coat and came back to the hall, where the policeman was waiting, Angela and Mrs. Sandys having disappeared, and together they went out through the door and down in the lift to the street entrance. She remembered vaguely that there was a police station somewhere near that looked as if it had been built out of a gigantic box of bricks by some unimaginative child.

"What'll they do with me?" she asked the same question again. "I haven't done anything. I'd not touch anyone else's money."

"You'll be charged by the sergeant," the policeman said, as though this explained everything, and Georgie was silent once more.

The office was brightly lighted by a strong electric lamp, and behind a table the night inspector sat writing in a large book. It surprised Georgie to think how quietly he seemed to accept crime and criminals, and he either ignored or did not hear the raging shouts of a drunken man who beat upon the door of his cell which must have been only a short distance off.

He glanced at her without curiosity or interest, and the policeman stated the particulars of the charge, while the night inspector listened with dreadful detachment. He seemed neither misanthropic nor pessimistic, but immortal in his patience. She was accused of theft, and the inspector read over the charge to her, uttering the words with a kind of unction, as if it was a part of a religious ceremony. If he owned to any human weakness, it was the pleasure he took in the deep sound of his own voice.

"I didn't steal anything," she said desperately.

"Have you any one who will go bail for you?" he asked, fixing her with a searching eye and speaking rather louder, for the man in the cells was shouting violently and threatening in a hoarse, angry voice.

"I don't know anyone," she faltered, her eyes filling with sudden tears. "Th' only friend I have went away to-day, and there's no one else," and she listened with an aching, bewildered mind to his words when he told her that she would pass the

night in a police cell and go before the magistrate the following morning.

"But not anywhere near the drunken man?" she implored. "My God! Listen to the way he's roaring."

"He can't get out," the inspector said with an acid smile, "and will do you no harm."

"Come on, now," the policeman remarked placidly, and Georgie followed him across a dark yard at the back of the building.

CHAPTER XXIX

It was very dark and bitterly cold in the cell where Georgie found herself, and an electric light over the door, that was turned on when she entered, showed her the narrow, dingy walls and a bare plank, which was to serve her as a seat or a bed, along the wall. Some blankets were thrown on it by a wardress, who undertook to search Georgie and stripped her of her small belongings. Her temper rose, and she felt her hands twitch to catch the woman by the shoulders and shake her until her glittering rows of false teeth dropped out. She seemed to regard Georgie with the utmost disfavour, and would not answer any questions she asked.

At length Georgie was alone, and the darkness closed in upon her as she sat down to think steadily. She had stolen nothing, and therefore she believed that the magistrate would certainly free her in the morning, so she must force herself to leap across the dark gulf of the hours and consider what she should do once she walked out of the police courts and was free again.

Like a dream stealing upon her out of the darkness, the thought of return came over her like balm. Ardclare became a haven of rest and refreshment, and the thought of Dada was merciful and spoke of peace. She had been beaten upon by the waves of this troublesome world so fiercely that she yearned most of all for calm, and thought longingly of her own land.

It was maddening not to be able to write at once to Dada, but after all that mattered very little. If she sold a gold chain which had been her mother's, and the little horse-shoe brooch which Clint had scorned, it would give her enough money to buy her ticket to Ardclare.

She pushed her hair out of her eyes, and stared at the dim patch of light behind the grated window set high in the wall. A woman in a neighboring cell was singing a vile and obscene song in a shrill, screaming voice, so she covered her ears with her hands and went on thinking steadily. Failures, after all, were not the exception in Ireland, and even if the "carriage"

population of Ardclare combined to make her as unhappy as they could, there would be plenty of the humble folk who would be kind and glad to see her back again.

Once she had made up her mind definitely, her spirits rose, and Georgie was almost happy in the dark sty where fate had set her. She was going back to Dada, whom, after John Lou-sada, she loved more dearly than any living being. She would find again the "fresh springs" in the drenched blue and gold country, and find green pastures and still waters in the silken quiet of the home she had known first and loved best. What did the police cells matter? It was part of a dreadful journey which brought you to a place of Heart's Desire, and the magistrate was only an official set up to punish offenders, and had no need to use his powers against such as Georgie Desmond.

In a few hours, she told herself, she would leave England for ever, never to return. It was a hard, selfish country, where people had no love in their hearts, and where she had suffered intolerably.

The cold grew more and more intense, and she wrapped the blankets over her knees and began to croon a little song just to cover the naked sordidness of the vile shrieking which continued intermittently from the woman who was her neighbour.

"Oh, the heart that has truly loved, never forgets
But as truly loves on to the close."

The woman next door hammered on the wall with her boot. "Shut up, there, you slut," she screamed. "None of your . . ." Georgie pulled the blankets up to her ears, fearful as she was as to their cleanliness, to drown the amazing torrent of abuse. The dawn came hideous and cold, and her hopes waned a little. The chances of life looked less golden, and fear touched her with icy fingers. Suppose that the magistrate were to make a mistake of any kind. What then?

At a little after daybreak there was much jangling of keys, and the prisoners of the night were marshalled into a large room, at the end of which was a policeman sitting behind a desk. Georgie marched in with the rest, just behind the Bacchante, who had by no means recovered from her overnight excesses, and stumbled as she walked, tearing a rag from a filthy petticoat. Georgie looked at the policeman and thought of him from an entirely new angle. He was not a comforting sight

any more; he was terrifying. Great and consoling as an ally, he was indeed alarming as a strangely impersonal foe who regarded you as "a bad character." There could not be much doubt about the others who bore her company, and she went up in her turn to give her name and age to be entered in a book.

It was still very early, and the sun had only just begun to paint faint colours on the roofs of the houses and to touch the grey sky with crimson and gold when Georgie and her raffish associates were pushed into a prison van, which was something like an omnibus divided by a partition down the centre. The grimy and odorous darkness inside was indescribable, and even the Bacchante was rendered silent by the noise it made bumping heavily down the streets. From time to time they stopped to pick up other women who had been in neighbouring police cells during the night, and drunken voices mingled one with another, as they all clung knee to knee in the strange fellowship of destitution. The darkness and the strong, piercing smell of unclean humanity together dulled Georgie's senses, until the Bacchante, who had grown very quiet, created a diversion by becoming violently sick, and calling upon her God that she was dying. Her condition aroused considerable sympathy, and there was a moment of some excitement, the men prisoners on the further side of the partition shouting such suggestions and remarks as seemed either encouraging or humorous to them. A girl in a well-cut coat and wearing furs was the next arrival. She was shot in, almost into Georgie's arms, and the heavily sweet scent she used was grateful in the stifling air of the van. But, to Georgie's surprise, when the girl spoke, though her voice was refined, her selection of oaths and epithets was sufficiently astounding, even in that company, to attract notice.

Having arrived at the police station, the van came to an abrupt standstill, and the doors were unlocked by a warder with a bunch of what looked like stage property keys, and again she followed in the strange company to a dark lavatory, where she was told she could wash her face. The girl in the good clothes, who was a handsome creature, and well aware of it, offered her a dab of powder which she had hidden in the corner of her crumpled handkerchief.

"Keep your end up, and don't let them bully you, dear," she said, nodding at Georgie and putting the collar of her coat straight. "What are you in for?"

Georgie explained as best she could, and the girl, out of a long experience, seemed hopeful. "They usually let a first offender off," she said. "I've been 'wanted' for some time. Not much chance for me."

Georgie's spirits fell again as she took up her place on a crowded bench where already a sad row of people were sitting, many of them boys, and beside her a wretched-looking girl, not much more than a child, whose condition was pathetically and dreadfully clear. From time to time the doors at either end of the room opened a little and let out a constant and subdued noise of murmuring voices, rather as though a service was in progress. Around her sat the publicans and sinners, looking pallid and weary, and denying the fond belief that sin is easy and vice pleasant; and where, she asked herself, was Christ? They all needed Him very badly indeed, she herself as much as the others, to pass with His "sweepy garment, vašt and white," and make them all clean and hopeful again.

The inmates of the van were taking the situation in their own individual ways, sullenly, or treating the matter as a commonplace affair, too familiar to be regarded as dramatic or tragic, and from time to time they were called upon and disappeared through one or other of the doors, the Bacchante going off with an impudent swish of her dirty skirts, though she trembled when the policeman spoke to her and only pulled herself together with an effort.

From having swelled double its size, Georgie's heart shrank suddenly and sickeningly as she saw her policeman advance and make a sign to her. She tilted up her head defiantly, and told herself again that she had nothing to fear, and the bold, well-dressed girl gave her a parting nod of encouragement.

The court was not a large one, and a crowd of people sat upon pews at the back. It had the effect of a church which had changed its mind at the last moment and turned itself into a cynical parody of a holy place, grim and alarming to the last degree. An elderly man sat behind a table with other elderly men beside him, facing the dock, and a small pulpit-like erection with a roof of dark cloth was the witness-box. The gloom of years and years seemed to hang about the place and create an atmosphere of dull despair, and Georgie walked forward and took her place behind the rails. Just as she had entered the court the policeman said in a discreet whisper: "Ask to be returned for trial," but what he meant

by this advice Georgie could not guess. All she wanted was to get done with the ugly farce and clear out of London, away from the misery of it all, but the sight of Angela Dubarry taking her place in the witness-box relighted the fire of her former anger, and she set her teeth and gripped the rails of the dock.

Angela looked handsome and distinguished in her plain coat and skirt; her face was pale and her dark eyes mournful. She carried with her a suggestion of calm assurance, and Georgie wondered whether it was possible that her own tossed and tumbled appearance might not prejudice the magistrate. If justice were a real thing, surely the fact of having no comb and not having had a bath ought to make no difference; but Georgie felt that the contrast between her and Angela was acute. What had the policeman whispered to her? Try as she would, she could not remember, and in any case all she wanted was freedom.

Miss Dubarry stated her case with great detail and a free use of names of power. How they got into the story was little short of miraculous, but there they were. The magistrate was interested, and nodded his head at intervals, and at the end of the recital he looked at Georgie and asked her abruptly: "Do you wish to question the witness?"

"Indeed, I do." Georgie spoke breathlessly, her eyes blazing. "Why are you putting your hand to this?" she turned to Angela. "What did I ever do to you that you should try and ruin me? I never took anything from your purse, and if I did wear your hat just once, I'm sorry I touched it. And the book of stamps you lost, you tried to make out that I took that, with everything else you've got against me. What are you doing it for? It's a crying shame . . ."

The magistrate interrupted her, and spoke in a dry, sharp voice. "You will have an opportunity of making a statement later. At present your only right is to question the witness. Do you wish to ask questions?"

"I was asking questions," Georgie retorted angrily. "Haven't I a right to ask what she means by it all? She's been working against me since the day she first came to the flat. Isn't it your place to see that I get justice?"

The magistrate lifted his shoulders very slightly and pushed out his under lip. He appeared to have come to some inward conclusion in regard to Georgie, and Mrs. Sandys took her

place in the witness-box and began to give her evidence, but she had only started when Georgie broke in desperately. "Mrs. Sandys," she implored, "you *know* that it's not true. Speak for me to th' old gentleman and tell him that I've done my best all along. If there's justice in England, I ought to be let off."

Once more the magistrate asserted himself sharply. He was evidently annoyed, and Mrs. Sandys only looked down and kept silence until the storm had ceased. When she left the witness-box Georgie felt that her faith had crashed to the earth. The policeman followed her with a short statement, and then the magistrate addressed himself afresh to Georgie. She was a first offender, and, as such, should be leniently dealt with, he told her, but as he spoke a flood of feeling swept her, and she broke out again.

"I've done *nothing*," she said defiantly. "I'll not be called an offender. Is it right to class me with people of bad conduct, and only because Miss Dubarry has lost her purse and hates the sight of me? It's not fair, and I'm here to get justice. Is it just to call me a thief and then let me off only because you say it's the first time?" She did not heed the attempts made to silence her. "If you take me out to shoot me I'll hold to it. I'm as innocent as you are, and I look to you to say so." Breathing hard, and with crimson cheeks, she stared around the court, and the magistrate examined the point of his pen.

"Will you take your judgment now?" he asked, and Georgie looked at him again. She had not the remotest idea what he meant, and her longing to be free was uppermost. He had said she was a first offender and must be leniently dealt with, so it was best, perhaps, to let it go at that. She decided that, though he seemed cross and disagreeable, he looked a gentleman, and that for the sake of liberty she had best submit without showing further fight.

"I'll take it now," she said shortly, and he sat forward in his chair and fixed her with his cold grey eyes. "I consider that you are a woman of violent temper," he said sternly, "and you yourself have referred to charges not made against you here, but which have been made by your employer and the lady in her house. On the evidence and on my own observation of you, I feel that a lesson is, in your case, highly necessary. Your sentence is a month's imprisonment with hard labour."

Georgie looked blindly at the dim figures around her and

then she drew a deep, hard breath and tilted up her chin. Not for the world, not for anything which could be offered to her, would she let them know that they had broken her down, and it was with no lessening of her defiance that she left the dock in charge of a warder.

CHAPTER XXX

GEORGIE was turning the handle of a mangle in a large room on the ground floor of Birdswell prison. On her arrival the high walls and the terrible stability of the place overcame her, and the awful echoing corridors, the obligato of jangling keys and the utter and desperate cleanliness of her surroundings seemed wholly incredible. Banishment was her portion, and her dreary cell was full of shadows which menaced her in some unholy way.

Her companions in misfortune were a collection of the dregs of many slums, and looked like people who had escaped from a plague-stricken city. Many of them were tarnished beyond redemption, and had a strong jail odour about them. They had been mutinous or sulkily acquiescent as their temperaments dictated, and what good it would be to any of them to be locked up in a little room, and not allowed to speak, no one could tell. Punishment was the reason, perhaps, but when she looked at them all, Georgie recalled the comforting belief that God did not deal with people after their sins, nor reward them according to their iniquity. What was wrong with the world that she and these evil-smelling women were on their way to a common jail?

All this woeful household, of which she now was to be a member, was composed of the flotsam of the streets. Drifting rubbish of the world; idiotic and quite inconsequent wanderers who got themselves into prison just as they might get anywhere that was bad for them. Prostitutes who seemed wholly without individuality, poor parasites who lacked sufficient character to be criminals. They drifted along miserably, like figments of a bad dream, piteous, fantastic beings, unable to help themselves, and now at the mercy of the legal remedy for disorder and crime. It was almost ridiculously funny to think of the solemn warders, the regiments of officials and the great building itself kept going like a huge and hateful hotel, in which sinners who got convicted were lodged for various terms; washed, fed and exercised, exhorted and preached to in the

prison church, and then turned out with less power than ever to resist the temptations of the streets.

There was a card in Georgie's cell with prayers printed upon it, and a Bible and a hymn-book, so that she could be busied saving her soul as she brooded there alone, but no one took any account of the atmosphere of the place, or the tainted feeling it gave to be herded in with all the rest, even if your heart ached with sympathy for the lowest and least of them.

To Georgie the whole proceeding was strange and intolerable, inexplicable, tragic—one of the mysteries of man's blindness to the true relation in which he should stand towards his fellow creatures. The chaplain regarded them all as, in general terms, given up to damnation. He had been embittered by disappointment, and Georgie felt silent when he visited her. She lived through eternities of solitude and silence, and her dread of something unknown filled her eyes with misery. What had the last inhabitant of her cell thought of through the hours? Had she repeated the prayers and read the Bible, or was it not more probable that she had let her fancies run riot, carrying her away to hell rather than remain in the dank, cold place where everything smelt of yellow soap and disinfectants?

In the neighbouring cells the inmates often cried and screamed, and no one took any notice of them. It was part of the system. The matron came and exhorted her, telling her to amend her ways and go home to her own people or her fate would be too awful to contemplate.

"You look a decent girl. Your head was clean and you keep yourself clean. Let this be a warning to you."

Georgie realised that a compliment was implied, and that not to have a "nitty head," or worse, was a distinction of which she had reason to be proud, but it did not console her. Prison was a place where you needed to be a martyr, to stand it without suffering from its sickening infection, and Georgie had no great cause to uplift her soul. It was small consolation to her to think that she was there not for her own good—even the most hypocritical had ceased to urge that—but as a warning to some girl she had never heard of and who might be about to start off upon a career of crime.

As she worked in the laundry she found that the silence rule could be evaded easily enough. Dressed in a full cotton

dress with a coarse apron and thick shoes, a starched quaker's cap covering her soft brown hair, she looked as though she was wearing fancy dress, which was by no means unbecoming. Her companions included the girl who had offered her powder at the police court, and they turned the mangle together while Georgie listened to a low-voiced description of the life of a London prostitute.

"Y'ought to give it up, and live decently," Georgie said, clinging desperately to her principles.

"What good did it do you to be straight?" the girl retorted. "Listen, I'll tell you something . . ." And then a hot, thick whisper that made Georgie's face flame. The world, the dense, overwhelming physical world, made its conquests so completely, and the rare, precious things of the spirit flickered away over the far horizon. Greed and sex rang their changes in the minds of the prisoners, and the narrow walls accentuated the power of both for untold evil.

The recreation ground was a desolate strip of grass with a flagged path around it, where the imbeciles and the vicious paraded round and round for a certain time every day, watched by the wardresses, who looked very respectable, but knew of so many awful things behind their attitude of cynical calm. The machine of civilisation ground on in ghastly hopelessness, crushing out what poor, weak individuality the ciphers brought there with them when they came. They were caged animals, and for the most part they behaved as such, and the heart-breaking misery tightened its grasp through the slowly dragging weeks. Georgie could get no letters, for it was the prison rule that silence must surround her for a month, and in any case her letters, if there were any, were collecting the dust in the newsagent's shop in Chelsea, waiting for her to come and call for them.

"The day we get out," the girl whispered to Georgie, for they had both got the same sentence, "I'll take you back to my room in Marylebone Road and give you a start. You'd pick a fellow up at the station, as likely as not, for you're not bad looking, and I want a pal."

"I'm going to drown meself," Georgie said cheerfully. "I'm sick of life, and I'll try a trip to heaven."

"Go on, don't be a fool," her companion replied quite amiably. "I'll put you on to it. I know a fellow who'd like your

style," and she spoke of restaurants and flash jewellery with a rage of starved longing in her voice.

At the end of the long month Georgie found herself outside the prison gates, dressed in her own clothes, and haunted by the feeling that she was afraid of the streets. The girl who called herself Pearl Havelock clung to her arm and tried to drag her off to a neighbouring public house for a drink, but Georgie made an excuse, and only escaped from the fierce friendliness of her fellow captive by promising to go to the house in Marylebone Road when she had got her belongings from the flat. The excuse was as good as any other, and at least got rid of Miss Havelock, whose main craving at that moment was for a tot of rum.

"I intend having a tear to-night," she said as she parted from Georgie at the street corner. "It's owing to me for a month. Don't you forget, I'll stand by you and be your best friend, as I said I would."

It was a wild day, with a hurricane still blowing hard, and she drifted along like a leaf before the wind. Friendless and without money, she found her way to the newsagent's shop, and the woman behind the counter looked at her suspiciously. She was an untidy woman, with pale eyes and a pointed nose.

"There's a couple of letters for you," she said, handing them over the counter. "Where *have* you been? You look like a ghost."

"'Tisn't more than I feel," Georgie replied and the woman remarked inconsequently: "That's right."

She grasped the letters in her hand and walked to the door. One was from Dada and one from Lousada. Even the envelopes comforted her.

"Awful storm," the woman remarked, looking up from a paper spread before her on the counter. "Lives lost, too."

Georgie took no notice. She was feeling very tired and done, and wondered if she would read her letters in the shop or go and sit on a seat on the Embankment. It would be some distance to walk, and she hesitated, not having made up her mind. A month in prison had made the habit of decision difficult even in little things.

"Fancy being blown overboard," the woman went on. "There's a piece here that tells you a lot about who they all were. One's a commercial traveller on his way to France, James

Wenman, aged 36, and there's a titled lady, too. I expect they'll have a photograph of her somewhere about." She moved her finger down the list, and as Georgie was about to turn and go, she called to her.

"Look at this," she said excitedly, "here's some feller with the same name as your own, Christian name and all, Eustace Cunningham Clint. He's overboard with the others. I hope it's no relation." She was quite excited, and Georgie went back mechanically to the counter.

"What's that you're telling me?" she asked.

"That a feller named Eustace Clint was drowned yesterday afternoon. Swept off the Dover boat," the newsagent's wife said, pointing to the paper, "and I 'ope it's not a relative——" She broke off quickly, as Georgie stumbled and leaned on the counter, a wave of vagueness sweeping over her. The newsagent's wife was a kindly soul, and she came quickly round the counter and cleared a seat which was heaped up with piles of papers.

"Sit there," she said. "Sudden news takes the wind out of a body. I know it well, for a neighbour of mine saw 'er husband's name in the casualty lists that very way. Oh, you pore dear, it's not as bad as all that, is it?"

Georgie recovered herself with difficulty, and took the paper in her hands, reading the printed announcement slowly over and over again. It told her that Eustace was dead, and the wretchedness of everything was too much for her. They had once been lovers, and there had been happy days for them in The Gleanings when first they were married, and now Eustace was dead, beaten upon by the swinging seas, and the whole story seemed just a broken, useless piece of inconsequent fatality. In her mind she saw him clearly, with his regular features and heavy dark blue eyes. Why had it been, what was the good of any of it, and why had it ended like this? She felt cold and sick. Eustace loved life and now he was dead, and since he was dead she knew that she was sorry for him and that she mourned the young man he had once been, and pitied the girl she once was.

"It is my husband," she said in a husky voice.

"Think of that!" the newsagent's wife said, not without satisfaction. But she was practical as well as inquisitive, and she felt pretty sure that the drowned man was Georgie's husband, and wished to do more than offer sympathy. "Come in

behind the shop and sit down to a cup of hot tea," she said, taking her by the arm. "That and a good cry'll do you good. Don't keep it in, it's a strain on the 'eart."

Georgie followed her silently and sat down at a table in a dark little room at the back of the shop. The idea of tea did comfort her, and after all, there was nowhere else to go. She was a widow now, and the word was such a strange one . . . beyond that she neither saw nor felt anything in particular.

"Pore dear, pore dear," the newsagent's wife said, as she set out cups and saucers. "It did give you a turn. You were white enough before but you turned like death. It wasn't right of me to read it out like that, but I never thought——"

"I haven't seen him very lately," Georgie said, and she clasped the letters again. If she opened and read them it might dispel the numbed iciness of her brain, and she must make some plan at once. She was too ill and too distracted to face the streets and the search for a room; the explanations of herself and her lack of luggage or money. All she had was ten shillings, which had been in her purse the morning of the police court trial, and that wasn't enough to buy confidence.

"Read your letters," the newsagent's wife suggested. "Take your mind off the shock. A good hearty cry would be better for you than anything else."

Georgie raised her head and collected her thoughts again, and with hands which were not altogether steady opened Dada's letter first. Inside she found a five pound note pinned to the sheet of paper. The letter itself was short, and told her that he had been gravely troubled about her news, and that Lady Duncarrig had returned to Ardclare and had spread reports of a most distressing nature about the trouble between Georgie and Clint.

"I am not a rich man, as you know," he wrote, "but I cannot leave you in want, and your home is open to you if you feel that you wish to return. I have always done my best for you, my poor child, and you must come back if you cannot have a reconciliation with your husband."

To the surprise of the newsagent's wife, Georgie pressed the letter to her lips. She had been forsaken so direly that her faith even in Dada's goodness was not all it would once have

been, and had he denied her the shelter of her old home, she would have bowed silently before his decision.

"Isn't he a lamb," she said, speaking to herself, and again she pressed the letter to her face.

"That's right," the newsagent's wife remarked hopefully. "Now swallow some hot tea, like a sensible girl."

"You're awfully kind," Georgie said, and her voice shook. "I'd forgotten how kind people are."

"Read your other letter," the woman said, nodding to her with a friendly smile. "Perhaps he parted from you lovingly. There's heaps can feel when the end is coming, and it softens the 'heart."

Thus encouraged, Georgie opened Lousada's letter, which was short and imperative.

"I have left England in a rage, Georgie, and without so much as a sight of you on the platform. What happened to you that night? I saw Clint as I came back to the restaurant, and guessed at once that you, too, had seen him, and that it had frightened you away. I say to myself over and over again, 'This can't go on.' Even now, for all I know, you may be homeless and in need of friends. Because I love you, you say I must not help you, and in your cruelty to us both you remain in a position which is wretchedly insecure. Even now I can't tell when I shall be back, and I am dreadfully anxious about you. Georgie, I love you too well to do or say the least little thing which would hurt you or seem to demand anything in return, and it is your goodness that makes you so dear, your simpleness and courage. I have known many brave men and a few women in my life, but no one else with your pluck, and oh, my dear, my dear, I know that when anyone is very brave they are always made to suffer abominably. You will think I am fussing ridiculously, and when you get this perhaps you may be still cooking that absurd Mrs. Sandys's dinner—I won't go on with this letter, but I beg of you, out of pity, to let me hear from you and tell me that you give me a thought now and again."

The dark little room, the table with the tea-cups, and the newsagent's wife, seemed to recede to an immeasurable distance, and Georgie leaned back in her chair.

Had she known the lines—"After exceeding ill, a little good"

—they might have occurred to her, but she had read very little, and behind the ice and the snow, the dirty sordid memories of the prison, and the misery of her own experience, Georgie was lifting up her heart in a passion of prayer and praise; was lost in wonder at the beauty and goodness of life, and the mercies bestowed upon her so lavishly. Dada was true to her, Miss White had sent "her dear love," and John Lousada—John had written a wonderful letter out of his wonderful heart. Once more her own heart spread wings and mounted upwards. Clint had been kind when they parted, though he had hopelessly misunderstood everything, but at least they had not parted as foes.

"You look a bit less like a corpse," the newsagent's wife remarked. "Another cup of tea? It would be more natural for you to cry. A neighbour of mine couldn't be got to cry for a week when 'er husband was killed under a train, until we took her to the pictures, and there she saw the very same thing 'appen to a man on the film, and she broke down something awful."

"It's very queer," Georgie said, "I don't want to cry now, somehow," but even as she spoke the unexpected tears came, and she covered her face with her hands.

"That's right," said the newsagent's wife, and she did not guess that Georgie was crying, not because of her overwhelming misery, but because, somehow or other, she felt safe.

CHAPTER XXXI

CHRISTMAS had come again, and the church at Ardclare was decorated, but by fewer hands than of old. Miss White, Milson Rogers, Georgie and the sexton had done it all this time, because there was a general boycott out against the widow of Eustace Clint.

Mr. Desmond was an object of pity, and it was felt that though, humanly speaking, he could not well have refused to take his daughter in, he ought never to have had a daughter like Georgie. It was his misfortune, but misfortunes have sometimes to be regarded very much as faults by the critical. There is one great advantage in adversity, and that is that it shows us our friends, even if they are few, and Georgie had learned that the outside world matters very little unless you permit it to do so. Mrs. Francis Dykes, Mrs. Sharkey, and many others were able to indulge in the joy of making everything as much worse for her as they could, but immune from their fiery darts, she went her way unscathed. She had nothing to be ashamed of, and so long as Dada loved her and was glad to see her back she could bear the malice of her pretended friends with equanimity.

And it seemed somehow that Dada did love her more than of old, though he spoke very little of Clint, and had never allowed her to tell him anything. Clint was dead, and that set a seal of silence upon the past. Miss White dressed up the whole affair to her own liking, and ignored the fact there had been any breach between Georgie and Eustace, and Milson Rogers never said a word to anyone on the subject.

As far as things temporal were concerned, Georgie was entirely independent, as Clint had never altered his will; even though she stubbornly refused to take more than what had represented her dress allowance, she was free from the necessity of making any demands upon Dada's slender purse. It was a relief of such magnitude that she was devotedly and even tearfully thankful for it as she reminded herself of her

many blessings in the little bare room where she had slept as a child.

She had been close to terror and despair; she had seen deep into the darkness and brokenness of other people's lives, and had known what it feels like to stand among the ruins of everything, in a wild and desolate place without a friend to help her: so that when one comes to consider it, it was not likely to matter much to her that Lady Duncarrig did not include her in even her least distinguished gathering at Ardclare.

"Lady Dun had a down on me all along," Georgie said, with a shrug of the shoulders, as she sat smoking a Woodbine in company with Milson Rogers. "First and last she's hated the sight of me, but I don't reely care, Milson."

"Why would you?" he asked, with a glance at her. "There's plenty who are different. I know one, who has cared for you a good while now, old girl."

"'Tis two years since we all decorated the church," Georgie said, moving uneasily, "and Finney took the solo. Poor Finney, I'd like to see him back, but I'm told they're very happy in Cork." She knocked the ash off her cigarette and stirred the fire. "I never told you, Milson, that there was one friend I had all along—John Lousada."

"Ah?" Milson remarked, staring at the flames.

"I met him at Ardclare," Georgie went on. "He was awfully true, and though I never speak of what happened to me in London, I d'no how I'd have got through with it, if it wasn't for him."

There was a long silence, and Milson did not look at Georgie, but without looking towards her he could really see the line of her profile; the little tilt of her nose and the wistful line of an eyebrow. She was warning him off, and he knew it. So all he did was to stretch out his hand and put it over hers, holding it firmly for a moment.

"That's all right, Georgie," he said; "I s'pose he'll likely come back one of these fine days?"

"I think he will," she replied, and once more they were silent until, upon the striking of a clock, Georgie jumped to her feet.

"Come on, or we'll be late for the practice," she said, "and the choir need no end of a lot of training since all the quality left us in the lurch."

"Damn them," Rogers remarked under his breath, and he

stood, rather a dejected figure, in the centre of the Rectory drawing-room.

Once more Georgie took her place at the organ and the small handful in the choir sang out loudly. They knew that only the school children and the poorer people who had no social status sat there now, and that Georgie was the reason; but Milson, who had no voice at all, was still there, and out of the shadows the remembered faces of the past clustered close to Georgie's side.

"For unto us a Son is born," they sang, because they had copies of the old anthem still, and it saved money and energy not to buy another to take its place. "For unto us a Son is given. And the government shall be upon His shoulders."

Poor Finney, Georgie thought, how kindly he had been, and she remembered Clint walking up the chancel steps in his red coat, the very picture of a young girl's dream of a lover. Dreams? What was the use of dreams, when reality had been so different? But at least that fragment had been charged with the wonderful passion of romance.

"And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

Georgie stopped and put her hands to her ears. "For goodness' sake keep the time. The whole of you is like a lot of turkeys who can't never keep step. Three beats now, and commence all over again. Trebles first, on the note when I give it you."

Her own thoughts began again with the music. How oddly the semblance of things repeated itself. Here she was, playing the organ with the choir making havoc of the anthem just as before, and yet, between her and that other Christmas there stretched disillusion and realism so black that it was best never to think of it at all. Yet what comfort there was in the changelessness of things. To know that the mountains outside lay darkly against the dark sky, and that the windows of the church shone like a little corner of an illuminated missal in the night, just as they always had, and that the old storm sang thrumming in the telegraph wires and crashing through the trees. The very thought of it filled her eyes with a desire for streaming tears, so that she caught herself back to the urgency of the task, as once more the trebles broke loose and screamed high upon a false note.

At length the practice was concluded, and the choir dis-

persed, leaving Georgie alone in the church. The tea-party days were over finally, so that there was no one to wait with her, and she put away the music and hymn books, while the sexton began to extinguish the oil lamps which hung from the roof. She was going home presently, and she wondered if the post would have come, bringing her a letter from John Lousada. It was some time since she had heard from him, and his plans had been rather chaotic when he wrote. When the books were all put away she came down the aisle and wished the sexton the compliments of the season, to which he responded gruffly, because he was not an enthusiast at any time.

"I'm foretelling a storm," he said pessimistically. "A wet Christmas makes a fat churchyard. There'll be plenty funerals this spring."

"You never know your luck, Thomas," Georgie replied cheerfully, as she pulled up the collar of her coat and went out into the wintry night. She felt a touch of depression come over her in one of those unaccountable waves of distress to which most of us are liable, and she wished that, for Dada's sake, the Ardclare people could find it in their hearts to be a little more kind. They did not hurt her much at the worst of times, but steady hostility distressed Dada sorely, making him not unfrequently gloomy and even slightly cross. Sacrifice and death are fine things and can be met finely, but it takes a great deal of saintliness to stand still and be pinched, for months together, and Georgie, though she had some humble touch of the heroic in her, was at times exasperated by too much pinching.

She let herself into the house quietly, and stood for a moment undecided whether or not to go to the study, where Dada was sure to be, or to go to the drawing-room, where the fire was still burning, and sit there alone, thinking her own thoughts; the temptation was strong, so strong that she opened the drawing-room door and went in. The room was in darkness except for the low light of the dancing flames, and by the fire she saw the dark outline of a man, who got up as she entered. For one second she thought it was Milson, who might have decided to desert "me grandmother" for once in a way and turned back to the Rectory to stay for supper.

"It looks as though I'd beaten the post, Georgie," Lousada said, standing where he was, and making the room do strange things to Georgie's eyes, for it swayed about giddily and then became stationary again.

"I did write to announce myself, but I gathered from an extremely irritable lady who let me in, that I was not expected."

"John!" she said in a queer, weak little voice. "Oh, my! I suppose Jane was wild. She never does like strangers."

"Oh, my!" he echoed, "I think she does not, Georgie."

But even then neither of them moved, and the warm glow of the fire hardly lighted their faces, so that they stood in deep shadow.

"The question isn't so much what Jane thinks, is it?" he went on; "I've come a long way to wish you a happy Christmas."

"Indeed, yes," Georgie said, and then he came suddenly towards her and held out his hands to her.

"And a happy New Year." He caught her into his arms. "Did you hear what I said to you, my girl?"

In a muffled voice Georgie replied huskily: "Yes, indeed."

THE END





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